# EDUCATIONAL COUNSELLING AND THE *COOL* IMPERATIVE:

# AN INTEGRATIVE-INTERPRETIVE REVIEW

by

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## ABSTRACT

The behaviour of adolescents in our society often results in unhealthy or dangerous consequences. Professional practitioners often are ineffective in guiding our youngsters toward positive and healthy behavioural choices because they attempt to address the problem behaviours themselves, rather than the processes through which teens are motivated to make such behavioural choices.

Previous research has defined "teenagerhood" as a discrete cultural stage through which many teens pass, and has suggested that their behavioural choices are often motivated by perceptions of "coolness", defined as social attractiveness. This thesis advances these notions, further suggesting they comprise a viable foundation on which to develop further research and practice in our school system, particularly with respect to preventing problems among teens.

Written from the stance of an integrative-interpretive review, this paper attempts to bridge the gap between research and practice through developing an ecological overview of teenagerhood and middle-level education. This study examines a wide variety of academic and popular literature pertaining to the culture of coolness, and middle school practice.

This paper draws five broad and interrelated conclusions: (a) that there is a need for innovative and appropriate research methods for integrating research and practice in education, particularly concerning ecologically complex issues

such as teenagerhood, coolness, and risky behavour; (b) that the problem of youth at risk is both real and serious; (c) that many youngsters need to be cool, and adults working with young adolescents need to understand, respect, and work with that knowledge; (d) that the function and structure of schools must accommodate youngsters' real characteristics, needs, and the contextual imperatives of teenagerhood and coolness; and (e) that the roles and practices of professionals in schools must fit youngsters' real characteristics, needs, and the contextual imperatives of teenagerhood and coolness.

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# DEDICATION

to John Chad Bryan,

Kimberley Frances Bryan,

and

Kelly Taylor Bryan:

*May you be as cool as you wish,*

*and as safe as I wish.*

(and, of course, to Jaye

who has always been cool.)

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction: Adolescents--Cool and At-Risk

> The hope and goal of parents and teachers alike is that children will reach adolescence, and subsequently adulthood, with the ability to cope successfully on a psychological, emotional, intellectual and social level; that they will avoid risk and injury at their own hands or those of another; and that they will recover quickly and effectively from damaging incidents which we are unable to prevent.
> (Kraizer, 1990)

Between the lines of Kraizer's (1990) statement, there is a dark significance in what is left unsaid, but clearly implied.

It is unfortunate, and often tragic, that the "goal of parents and teachers" as outlined by Kraizer (1990) is all too often unattained, and that their "hope" is often dashed. All too often, our children do not cope successfully. They do not always avoid risk and injury. And, sadly, they do not always recover from damaging incidents.

Whereas younger children may be easier to safeguard, our adolescent youngsters are more susceptible to a wide multiplicity of pitfalls. The challenge facing us, as parents or teachers, is how to assist or to encourage our youngsters to make safe and healthy choices, and to cope with life's challenges, in the face of the burgeoning demands that seem to occur in adolescence, that developmental phase from puberty to departure from secondary school.

This study takes on that challenge by identifying processes through which inherent problems occur, by suggesting strategies which could effectively counteract these problems, and by providing some insights into approaches which, theoretically, might prove efficacious to prevent problems from occurring in the first place.

A wide variety of literature exists documenting the myriad problems facing our youngsters as they progress through childhood, into adolescence and beyond. Concomitantly, an enormous body of literature exists describing our society's efforts to provide, through research and practice, solutions to these challenges. Such documentation comprises a wide range of approaches, from rigorous academic research, bound and catalogued, to ephemerata found in popular publications such as newspapers or magazines. All have something to say concerning what to do about the problems facing our younger generation. Sadly, not all can boast of success. More sadly, some actually appear to have exacerbated the problem they were designed to alleviate.

Many problems endure. This study posits the need for fresh and innovative approaches, given the enormous complexities and interrelationships among the various inherent issues. This paper asserts the need for an ecological stance, and consequently, the consideration of a wide variety of sources, pursuant to seeking viable solutions to the problems identified.

Chapter 2 of this study continues where this introductory chapter leaves off, outlining and defining the nature of the problem in greater detail, and proposing the need for us to adopt a recently emerging construct--a new "lens"--through which we might view and conceptualize effective approaches to the problems facing our youngsters.

In Chapter 3, this paper discusses the method used in this study. In the spirit of seeking new and innovative approaches, this study adopts an integration of two formats rapidly gaining stature in the realm of research methodology--a combined integrative (Cooper, 1982, 1985, 1998) and interpretive (Eisenhart, 1998) literature review. These methodological formats are first located and discussed within the broad spectrum of existing research paradigms, and then are proposed as appropriate, effective, and acceptable forms of research for this study, given the ecological imperatives imposed by the nature of the topic.

The study continues, in Chapter 4, with a close examination of a theoretical work which comprises an innovative and viable approach through which we may address the problems facing our youngsters, and the professionals who support them. Marcel Danesi's (1994) book, *Cool: The Signs and Meanings of Adolescence*, coins the term "teenagerhood" as describing a unique and discrete culture, the essence of which is a strong motivation for adolescents to order their lives in a way which they perceive to be "cool"--that is, to behave in ways which are seen by peers as socially attractive. This study makes the point that through understanding and appreciating what motivates many of our youngsters, we can work more sensitively, cooperatively, and effectively with them.

Danesi's (1994) book defines his view of "coolness", beginning with the emergence, historically, of teenagerhood and coolness as psycho-social phenomena, followed by a delineation of the predominant signs and symbols of coolness, and concluding with some comments pertaining to some obvious limitations of this view of teenagerhood. Chapter 4 of this study will also examine selections of literature, vis-à-vis Danesi's ideas, pertaining to those dimensions of early adolescence which relate to the acquisition of the need to be cool, and to the inherent risks which threaten our youngsters' health and well-being.

Chapter 5 focuses on literature pertaining to the structure of our schools, the roles of school personnel, and particularly of educational counsellors, and the efficacy of some of the efforts and programs currently on line, with respect to addressing the risks of adolescent behaviours. This study takes the stance that knowledge and utilization of Danesi's (1994) ideas will thereby enhance those efforts and programs.

Finally Chapter 6 summarizes the ideas presented in the preceding pages, offers some meaningful conclusions with respect to the extent to how we, as school professionals, might in theory use Danesi's (1994) views on adolescent coolness to help us better understand our youngsters, and further to help them make positive and safe choices.

This study purports to comprise a general survey--a broad overview--in which a new approach is initially applied to the problems identified. In view of the immensity of the ecosystem which this study undertakes to consider, conclusions will be broad and general in scope. Accordingly, in light of this study's limitations, suggestions will emerge concerning areas in which further study or research might benefit our youngsters.

To adopt a metaphor appropriate to ecology, this study will range far and wide throughout the forest. The intent will be not to pause to examine any one organism, or feature of the environment, at great length or in great detail. Perhaps future journeyers will undertake to pick up where this tour leaves off. But by the end of the journey, hopefully this study will have achieved a broad understanding of the forest as a whole, and perhaps, through the view afforded by our new lens, will have attained a clearer view of some features of the forest hitherto obscured by the haze of a limited perspective.

# CHAPTER 2

## The Scope of the Challenge and the Emergence of a New Approach

> God made teenagers so parents wouldn't be so devastated when their children finally grow up and leave home.
>
> (Author unknown)

Teenage behaviour--can anyone avoid noticing it? While occasionally it may dazzle with its brilliance, does it not more often shock, infuriate, disgust, horrify or appall?

Jason, 14, dyes his hair bright green. Melissa, 15, skips classes, while her grades drop from an "A" average to a "C-". Nicole, 13, is suspended from school for smoking on the school grounds. Mike, 16, crashes his father's car into a ditch following a Saturday evening party at the gravel pit. Amy, 14, gets her eyebrow, nose, and tongue pierced. Jeff, 15, wears a toque pulled down over his ears, a ragged mackinaw, and baggy pants with the crotch down to his knees. Lisa, 14, becomes pregnant. Dustin, 13, hearing that his favourite rock star has committed suicide, talks about committing suicide himself. And Matt, 15, pockets a handgun as he heads off to school.

Is there a respectable adult who doesn't succumb occasionally to deploring the outrageous fashions, raucous music, rampant drug and alcohol use, blatant sexuality, disrespectful demeanour, and general flaunting of conventions which seem to be characteristic of many of today's teenagers? As Caissy (1994) says, "Many adults are repulsed by such young groups of 'disrespectful' kids marauding around malls, especially if they are smoking, swearing, wearing weird clothes and makeup, and laughing at other people" (p. 74).

It's bad enough that teen behaviours shock and offend our sense of taste and propriety, but all too often the actions of adolescents have devastating long-term or permanent results. Jason's choice to dye his hair green may have no lasting or deleterious effects on his life, but Lisa's decision to become sexually active, and thereby inadvertently pregnant, may destroy her dreams to become a doctor, or to travel the world. And Mike's choice to drink and drive might kill him before he reaches 17. It's clear that there is a wide range of consequences, and severity thereof, which can follow the choices made by our young people. When our children sport green hair, it may be merely offensive, but when they die prematurely, it may be devastating.

## Clarifying the Problem

McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter and McWhirter (1993) list several categories of "at-risk" teen behaviours having potentially serious consequences: dropping out of school, substance use and addiction, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS, delinquency, violence, and suicide. Is there a local community which hasn't been saddened recently by the news of young persons' lives forever damaged, if not destroyed, by the results of such behaviour?

Further, as McWhirter et al. (1993) and Kazdin (1993) point out, at-risk behaviours tend to cluster and reinforce each other. Jason's green hair could indicate a predisposition toward delinquency; Melissa's truancy might signal a concomitant drug problem.

Beyond the impact that teens' actions can have on personal lives, ours as well as their own, society at large has a stake in the outcomes of the personal choices made by our teens, according to McWhirter et al. (1993):

> Our society depends on our ability to prepare well-adjusted, responsible, well-educated young people to step forward as the older generation passes. Our nation's continuing strength and stability depend on our ability to ensure that our youth are prepared to fill the courtrooms and boardrooms, the classrooms and operating rooms, the high-tech factories and industries of tomorrow. If youngsters are to be prepared to meet the demands of the future, schools, families, and communities must be involved in the project. (p. 3)

Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1998) agree, insisting "We no longer can afford the economic drain of disposable people" (p. 5). But does this view represent the whole picture?

To complicate the discussion further, Lesko (1996) warns against the tendency for adults to force their own agendas upon teens. She describes the position of adolescents as ". . . multiply inferior. They are expected to measure up to finely tuned assessments of productivity, learning, morality, [and] achievement while remaining in a social position that is dependent and watched over by not only adults but by their age-peers, as well" (p. 465). She leaves us pondering a thorny question: At what point does our desire to see our youngsters turn out safe and successful cross the line and become exploitation?

Similarly, Brendtro et al. (1998) point out that we, as a society, tend to treat our children as "property or vassals": "One of the most patronizing statements that adults make about youth is that 'they are our future citizens'. This idea of Western culture is embodied in the educational myth that teaching obedience produces responsible adults" (p. 25). They suggest that if youth are only future citizens, where is the motivation for them to make responsible choices in the present?

Kraizer (1990) suggests that current scientific efforts focus too much on youth's problems, and too little on the processes by which youngsters become enmeshed in those problems. Allen, Leadbeater, and Aber (1990) concur, stating that our task should be to identify the underlying bases of risk of problems in social development that are manifested as problem behaviors in adolescence so that we can understand the development of those problem behaviors, and target scarce resources toward their prevention and treatment (pp. 85-86).

How real are our perceptions about current risks facing our teens today? As a benchmark or reality check, this study will refer often to the McCreary Centre Society's (1999) "Healthy Connections: Listening to B. C. Youth" (hereinafter cited as McCreary, 1999). This report, concerning adolescent health and risky behaviour, summarizes some of the major findings resulting from a survey completed by nearly 26,000 students in British Columbia in 1998/99, and compares them with data compiled from a similar survey completed in 1992.

Dycus and Costner (1990) affirm that life is about choices. McCreary (1999) points out that:

> Most health problems during the teenage years are caused by preventable actions, such as drinking and driving or unprotected sexual activity. Adolescence also is the time when individuals often establish life-long attitudes and habits, such as smoking, diet and exercise. (p. 6)

To the extent that motivation has something to do with the harmful choices our adolescent youngsters sometimes make, it makes sense to come to grips with the processes whereby teens are motivated to make choices? What, then, are these processes? How are our teens motivated? Why do kids choose to do the things they do?

Trained professionals and academics, responding to such plaintive inquiries, might mumble over their lattés about rebelliousness and developmental stages and peer pressure and self-esteem and identity and the effects of the media. But when Amy is asked why she wears an eyebrow ring, or when Jeff is questioned as to why he dresses the way he does, they are just as likely as not to answer, " Because it's cool!" Whatever that means.

<u>Seeking Solutions: A New Viewpoint</u>

Danesi (1994) suggests there is cause to believe that teenagerhood should be viewed as a discrete culture, comprising a set of psycho-social parameters which define the way many adolescents choose to live their lives, the essence of which is the desire to be cool. According to Danesi, it is the processes of seeking to envision and attain coolness that comprise the motivation which shapes many adolescents' attitudes and behaviours. If adults are to intervene in the lives of at-risk teens, encouraging them to make wise and healthy choices in order to stave off some of the potentially harmful consequences which result from their behaviours, then understanding their sense of what coolness is all about might be a good place to start.

There is strong agreement, of course, that it's more desirable to prevent problems than to have to deal with them after they've occurred (Goleman, 1995; Hamburg, 1993; Kazdin, 1993; Kraizer, 1990), and if this is the goal, waiting until our youngsters attain adolescence is likely too late. As Danesi (1994) affirms, youngsters are not born with visions of coolness, like sugar-plums, dancing in their heads and influencing their attitudes and actions. Sometime, between birth and adolescence, these visions are attained; in the argot of teens, kids become "cool wannabes" (want-to-be's). That is where our efforts might better be focused. As Hamburg says, "The early adolescent years specifically, ten to fifteen years of age, are open to the formation of behavioral patterns that have lifelong consequences for the educational performance and health status of adolescents" (p. 466).

It would be well for us, then, to focus our concerns on that period during which the characteristics of childhood begin to fade and be replaced by those of adolescence--the phase known as early adolescence or as "transescence" (McEwin & Thomason, 1989; Steele, 1985). Danesi's (1994) work provides a clear snapshot of what cool adolescent culture is all about, but unfortunately, although he outlines the processes through which he feels pre-adolescents come to attain visions of coolness, he chooses not to focus on transescence, as a discrete stage, to any significant degree.

In the context of this study, then, it is important to define this phase of life. Thornburg (1986) suggests that youngsters of this age comprise a "distinctive group" which merits study independent of those of either childhood or adolescence. McEwin and Thomasin (1989) agree, suggesting that although human development is a continuous process, and that there is no universal agreement on which ages comprise transescence, we must avoid thinking of this stage merely as a "transition", however much transition may characterize this phase of development (p. 7). Petersen, Leffert, and Graham (1995) define early adolescence as the first of three subphases of adolescence, comprising youngsters aged 10-14, and hallmarked by the onset of puberty.

In our school system, it is becoming increasingly common to refer to the grades containing transescent students as "middle grades", and indeed many school districts have established "middle schools" based on the philosophy that transescence is a unique stage which can be served best by schools containing only students of that age group. While there is no clear agreement exactly as to which grades comprise "middle-level" (Epstein, 1990), the transescent years of 10-14 as proposed by Petersen et al. (1995) imply approximately Grades 5-9.

Whether we refer to transescent youngsters by grade or by age is perhaps less important than how we perceive and delineate the characteristics which prevail at this stage. Goleman (1995) describes puberty as ". . . a time of extraordinary change in the child's biology, thinking capacities, and brain functioning. . . [and also] a crucial time for emotional and social lessons" (p. 274). According to Petersen et al. (1995), it is a time in which individuals experience

> . . . tremendous change in all areas of individual development and in all important social contexts. . . . The biological changes associated with puberty are the most dramatic and rapid since infancy. . . . Of even greater significance than the occurrence of pubertal change are the individual variations in the timing and the tempo of these changes. (p. 5)

Among the aspects of life which may be affected by these variations, according to Petersen et al., are body image and self-esteem, which may deteriorate during transescence. Related issues include feelings about attractiveness, peer acceptance, academic competence, and athletic ability. Declining self-esteem is linked to depression, suicidal ideation, delinquency, and substance abuse (pp. 5-6). It is not difficult to envision the early adolescent, as portrayed by Petersen et al., vulnerable to the need to strive for a sense of coolness, as proposed by Danesi (1994), in order to bolster a sagging self-image.

Using Danesi's (1994) lens to view the risks of adolescence, then, this study will focus on the potential for educational counsellors to enhance the proactive dimensions of their work with youngsters through increased sensitivity to, and knowledge of, the importance of coolness to their clientele--the youngsters with whom they work.

# CHAPTER 3

## This Study's Method: The Need for an Integrative-Interpretive Review

> A thesis must have relevance beyond the local conditions of its execution.
>
> (Kilbourn, 1999)

Can there be any doubt that the multiple issues and factors concerning the lives of our younger generation, and the myriad problems and potential solutions related thereto, are indeed complex, diverse, and ineluctibly interrelated? The old adage stating, "For every complicated problem, there is a solution that is short, simple, and wrong," sounds like it could have been written by an experienced parent, teacher, or counsellor.

The nature of the problems under scrutiny, as identified in the previous chapter, demands a form of research appropriate to its inherent complexity. Integral to the philosophy of this study is the notion that its focus must be wide-angled, extensive, interpretive and ecological, rather than narrow, intensive, descriptive and specialized. One goal throughout will be to integrate contributions made not only by researchers in the academy, but also by practitioners in the field, and thus address the concern expressed by Brendtro et al. (1998): "Our field seems to be caught in a dilemma where those who research and write do not understand practice while gifted practitioners do not believe they have the time or talent to write" (p. 2). This study will also comprise contributions made by youth themselves. Their perspective represents an integral part of the ecosystem.

In the process of reviewing a wide variety of literature, this thesis will combine approaches identified by Cooper (1982, 1985, 1998) as an integrative review, and by Eisenhart (1998) as an interpretive review, with the thought in mind that this combination should comprise the most appropriate method to deal with the nature of the problem put. The two approaches have much in common, yet present fundamental differences. In the following pages, this paper will first locate the processes of the research review within the broad realm of research methodology, and then will outline the extent to which this study is aligned with the approaches outlined by Cooper and Eisenhart.

The Methodological Legitimacy of the Research Review

Concerning the development of research methodology in recent years, Oberle (1991) outlines how, since approximately 1970, the philosophical bases of academic research have increased and expanded. Quantitative research, based on positivist thought, still endures. Qualitative methods have steadily gained acceptance, especially in the human sciences. Oberle summarizes the thinking which underlies this trend:

> Antipositivists maintain that there is not one immutable reality, but rather that reality exists in the mind of each individual. Because human understandings are intertwined with intentions, goals,

> and purposes, study in the human sciences must incorporate context, rather than attempt to exclude or remove it. Thus the investigator and the subject of investigation cannot be separated. (p. 88)

Ultimately, she propounds a middle ground on which methods are blended, suggesting, "The goal of science is defined as problem solving, and acceptable methods include any that can help to solve the problems of interest" (p. 95).

Kilbourn's (1999) stance parallels that of Oberle (1991). He posits that the function of theses is to present evidence: "Theses of all stripes involve matters of evidence in one way or another, even though the interpretation of the term *evidence* is clearly open to question" (p. 27). He perceives the process as comprising two differing types. Multiplicative corroboration, which relies on the positivist principles of empirical science, involves repeated observations of specified phenomena resulting in conclusions which corroborate each other. Structural corroboration relies on the convergence of differing information to provide structural connection and coherent meaning. The two, he suggests, are complementary, rather than mutually exclusive or oppositional: "Structural and multiplicative corroboration work hand-in-glove and in real life we use both forms to make sense of our experiences and to guide our actions" (p. 27).

Notwithstanding, it would appear that old habits in research die hard. And while a complete overview of the history of methodology is well beyond the scope of this study, a few comments may be appropriate. Concerning the burgeoning trend in recent years toward qualitative studies, one quantitative researcher said lightheartedly, albeit ruefully, "Qualitative research is often touted as being 'richer,' or 'fuller,' or as providing 'thick texture.' When I first heard these terms dropped into academic conversations, I thought my colleagues were talking about cappucino or something" (Cizek, 1995, p. 26). His comments really don't belie Oberle's (1991) more sinister depiction of a methodological "battle", which, as she says ". . . will be won when researchers make their decisions based on informed deliberation, not dogma. As the debate continues, hope grows for true advance in research in education" (p. 96). The title of her article is significant in its ominousness: "Paradigm Wars: Who's Fighting; Who's Winning." (Shouts of "May the force be with you!" might be the cool response.) Kilbourn (1999) summarizes:

> The educational research community is presently in considerable turmoil as to the precise nature of a thesis. On the one hand, it would be foolish to ignore the subtleties of changing form as the community continues to evolve; on the other, it would be foolish to toss out familiar form for the sake of fashion. The difficulty is that it is not always easy to distinguish mere fashion from useful form. (p. 28)

Viewing this methodological squabble from the stance of this study, (and intending no disrespect), this researcher envisions a group of adults in an ivy-covered edifice, cappucinos in hand, engaged in spirited academic debate. Meanwhile, out in the parking lot, their youngsters, having skipped school, are making out and getting wasted on beer and doobies, prevenient to wrapping their car around a telephone pole, perhaps to die. (Any need to explicate the term "doobie" will further underscore the point being made.)

More recently, Mauch and Birch (1998) point out that acceptable and effective research methods comprise an increasingly wide variety of formats located somewhere among or beyond the dichotomous (and ubiquitous) quantitative-qualitative paradigms. They argue that the key criterion for method selection is the match between the method and the theoretical or hypothetical propositions under investigative scrutiny:

> It is the statement of the problem that properly serves as a launch pad for all the subsequent steps. The correct research methodology should fit smoothly into its place in the research plan sequence to move from what one seeks by doing research to how one goes about seeking it.
>
> These inquiries should govern selection of a research methodology: "What is (a) the most practical, (b) the most efficient, (c) the most promising, and (d) the most readily available way to solve the research problem or answer the research question?" (p. 116)

They conclude that the measure of appropriateness of a chosen method is the extent to which it will produce useful evidence with respect to the problem as stated (p. 123).

Duke and Beck (1999) support Mauch and Birch's (1998) stance, suggesting that while traditional forms of research are valuable, alternative approaches also have merit. Further, they contend, the field of Education in particular is still lagging behind in embracing alternative methods which might contribute significantly to our knowledge in the field.

Reverting to our ecological metaphor, Kraizer's (1990) comments appear prescient, and lend credence to the need for innovative and alternative methodological approaches:

> The predisposition in current scientific and public focus, to break everything down into its smallest component parts, causes us to lose sight of the forest for the trees. There is a proliferation of groups that have a specific approach, program, theory, or solution for each of the problem areas confronting youth today. Each group focuses on only one area of prevention, offering expertise and techniques to alter behavior it considers inappropriate. This predisposition cripples our ability to be effective because the range of social and personal dysfunction are actually individual branches of the same tree, to be managed by dealing with the root causes. We cannot begin to be truly effective until we recognize and address the integrated nature of all these problems. (p. 132)

To view the whole forest, then, I have chosen to use the wide-angled view that an extensive literature review might provide. The ". . . integrated nature of all these problems" calls for an integrative approach to a solution.

In more recent years, researchers have advocated for the acceptance of the literature review as a research method legitimate in its own right. Clearly, literature reviews historically have been integral components of virtually all research paradigms. As Benson, Sporakowski, and Stremmel (1992) say:

> Research without literature reviews may be a fantasy to students struggling with writing a thesis, dissertation, or introduction to a paper. Despite the momentary blissful image, a science without literature reviews quickly would cease to be a science. Without the literature review, theories would remain hopelessly isolated from one another and bodies of empirical research would become mere laundry lists of findings. . . . The multiplicity of paradigms, variety of theoretical bases, and the variation in methodologies imply a critical need for the integration that literature reviews afford. (p. 65)

However the delineation of a literature review, as a discrete research method in its own right, requires further comment.

Cooper (1998) points to a rapidly burgeoning problem inherent in modern research; he cites Garvey and Griffith (1971):

> The individual scientist is being overloaded with scientific information. Perhaps the alarm over an "information crisis" arose because sometime in the last information doubling period, the individual [researcher] became overburdened and could no longer keep up with and assimilate all the information being produced that was related to his primary specialty. (p. 2)

As a result, suggests Cooper (1985), a researcher's responses typically are two-pronged. There has been a narrowing of specialization, in order to keep up with the demands of primary research, and there is a greater reliance on literature reviews to remain abreast of developments in related fields of interest (p. 3).

Cooper points to ". . . the need for trustworthy research syntheses" (p. 2) in the form of comprehensive integrative literature reviews, which, he insists, should follow the same rules of rigorous, systematic inquiry, as for primary research. Fortuitously concomitant to the crisis in informational overload, suggests Cooper, is the emerging facilitation of access to that information through the use of computer technology and on-line searching techniques.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Cooper (1985) points to a dramatic increase, between 1969 and 1983, of reviews catalogued as legitimate research in the databases of two major abstracting services, *Psychological Abstracts*, and *The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC).* Despite this recent proliferation of research reviews in academic databases, however, Cooper suggests that very little has been done to integrate their unique attributes into the broad scope of academic research formats. Accordingly, subsequent to examining a wide variety of sources derived from databases and journals, he offers a general and standardized definition for the research review:

> First, a literature review uses as its database reports of primary or original scholarship, and does not report new primary scholarship itself. . . . The types of scholarship may be empirical, theoretical, critical/analytic, or methodological in nature.
>
> Second, a literature review seeks to describe, summarize, evaluate, clarify, and/or integrate the content of the primary reports. . . . Sometimes the documents being evaluated and integrated in a literature review are themselves theoretical statements or other

> literature reviews. Other times, theoretical positions form the framework for evaluation and integration, thus rendering the review more hypothetico-deductive in character. This issue leads away from the problem of how generally to define the form to the problem of how to distinguish among different types of literature reviews. (p. 7)

Concerning the academic legitimacy of the research review, Cooper (1982, 1998) insists that inferences made in the process of completing a research review can be as central to the validity of knowledge in the behavioural sciences as are those made in primary research. He suggests that in developing the research review process, which he terms integrative review, it is possible--and necessary--to adopt the rigorous methodology typical of quantitative research. Cooper's conceptualization comprises five stages, parallel to those found in primary research. Within each, he identifies strategies to reduce potential sources of variance which can threaten the validity of conclusions:

1. <u>Problem formulation stage.</u> This involves defining the variables involved in the inquiry in two different ways, conceptually and operationally. When reviewers apply different operational definitions or levels of abstraction for a particular concept, or when reviewers vary in the attention they pay to methodological distinctions in the literature, validity is threatened. To minimize the risk, Cooper (1982, 1998) suggests utilizing broader conceptual definitions, and examining a greater number of operational details within the constructs

examined.

2. Data collection stage. Determining the population of elements that will be the referent for the inquiry is undertaken at this stage. Discrepancies among researchers can occur through using different channels--citation indexes or abstracting services--to retrieve information. Cooper (1982, 1998) proposes optimizing validity through utilizing the broadest possible sources of information, and at the same time, qualifying the conclusions by providing information pertaining to underrepresentation or overrepresentation of portions of the project's target population.

3. Data evaluation stage. This step involves making critical judgments about the quality of individual data, examining each in light of evidence pertaining to contamination by irrelevant factors. Cooper (1982, 1998) suggests the use of evaluative criteria based strictly on methodological quality, together with the adoption of wide confidence intervals to allow for possible incomplete reporting by the primary researchers cited.

4. Analysis and interpretation stage. In this stage, the separate data points collected by the researcher are synthesized into a unified statement concerning the research problem. Cooper (1982, 1998) urges researchers to be aware of the differences in results which may emerge from varying interpretive techniques or inference rules used in the literature cited.

5. Public presentation stage. This involves communicating the processes and results comprising the review for a specified audience. Cooper (1982, 1998) cautions against the omission of methodological details which might reduce the replicability of the conclusions, and against the omission of evidence which might interest future researchers.

Cooper (1982) summarizes:

> The supposition underlying this model of literature reviewing is that it is a data-gathering exercise which needs to be evaluated against scientific criteria. As with primary research, reviewers must take precautions to avoid bias in conducting their study. Equally important, the reviewer must produce a report which allows readers to assess the review's validity and to conduct direct replications, if they so desire. Also similar to primary research, the perfect literature review does not exist. (p. 7)

Cooper's use of the term "integrative" with respect to literature reviews clearly intends to refer to the processes through which individual research projects can be brought together (integrated) in order to synthesize coherent patterns of meaning. In conceptualizing the research review as a scientific inquiry paralleling primary research, Cooper has perhaps succeeded also in providing a potentially integrative function among varying paradigms of research. If so, his contribution is all the more valuable.

A difficulty underlying Cooper's (1982, 1998) model is evident, however, and as much as this does not diminish the value of his contribution, the concern should be raised. Clearly, in attempting to reduce variance in order to maximize validity at every stage in his model, he makes it clear that the reviewer must necessarily make continual decisions, if not outright judgments. This process, ultimately, appears to comprise aspects of interpretation, no matter how objective the intent of the reviewer may be. The problem is particularly thorny when the review process includes elements which are not themselves characterized by scientific rigor, but whose inclusion may be desirable for an ecological perspective. (This study is a case in point. I made a conscious choice in some cases to include elements that lack rigor but reflect the variety of sources that shape our understanding of coolness and teenagerhood. This point will be further developed in the pages to follow.) Where rigor is desirable, however, in the goals of the specific project, Cooper provides a clear and workable blueprint.

Abandoning for the moment Kraizer's (1990) arboreal metaphor, cited above, Eisenhart (1998) likens academic research to building stone walls. Traditional experimental research projects comprise individual stones, used either to fill holes in the wall, or to heighten the overall structure. Studies which review existing research projects represent a wider view--the wall as a whole. "Good reviews (like good walls) compact, so that gaps in the field (holes in the wall) establish dimensions, so that the width and breadth of the field are defined" (p. 394). The integrative review as conceptualized by Cooper (1982,

1998) appears to fit this vision. His contribution has given us sound methods--a building code--enabling us consistently to make walls which are straight, square, and strong.

But is a straight, square, strong wall really what we need, given the intent of this study, which is to pursue innovative approaches in response to the complexities and varieties of the inherent issues? Indeed, walls can be seen as barriers impeding vision and progress. Many of the problems of teenagerhood and risky behaviour lie beyond the wall. If we are to address these problems effectively, we must venture beyond the wall, and perhaps in doing so, breach its structure.

Accordingly, Eisenhart (1998) takes the metaphor further, suggesting that a process of effective interpretive review is much more dynamic than building a wall; she speaks of "frozen-ground-swells [that] . . . heave up what we have already learned (the wall), not settle it; they would reveal previously hidden or unexpected possibilities (i. e., lay bare the wall's supports and components or transform its shape" (p. 394). She goes on to complete the metaphor:

> If we move away from a close analogy and add the possibility of human intervention (certainly fundamental to interpretivism), then what was once a wall may be further transformed into a cairn marking a trail, a ring outlining a garden, a fireplace for a home, a display of geological forms, or innumerable other things. What is made of the once-wall will depend on the purposes and ingenuity of the person who finds it

> and puts it to some use in the context of his or her life. Reviews-as-groundswells wouldn't give readers stories of walls; they would give us stories that startle us with what we have failed to notice about a wall and the possibilities for new thinking that arise from different ways of viewing or using it and its parts. (pp. 394-395)

It is a vivid figure of speech outlining a fascinating academic challenge.

Eisenhart (1998) lists three potentially valuable outcomes of interpretive scholarship:

1. Interpretive research can have the power to reveal ideas which may be surprising, startling or new, and perhaps to present information that is disruptive to conventional thinking (Eisenhart, 1998, p. 392). This has the flavour of the old and hackneyed expression, "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got!" To the extent that "what we've always got" is adolescents at risk for a variety of downfalls, then maybe what we need is a fresh approach, or at least a new lens through which to view our teens' attitudes and behaviours. More to the point, surely "startling, new ideas" and "disruptive to conventional thinking" epitomizes the very essence of teenagerhood, as presented by Danesi (1994) in the next chapter of this study.

2. Interpretive research is based on the idea that differences in views arise from the ways people regard things in the socially and culturally organized context of their lives. In other words, meaning derives from the patterns of life by which it is viewed. "Exposing different logics, or 'multiple ways of understanding

the world,' that arise from different circumstances is another hallmark of interpretive research" (Eisenhart, 1998, p. 393). The evidence examined in the next chapter of this study, strongly suggests that our teens, in fact, view the world in ways which are significantly different from those of us who are older, (and, as we would prefer to think, wiser). The practitioner who seeks to understand teens must give consideration to the cultural context in which they order their lives.

3. Interpretive scholarship is based on a commitment to utilize research findings to enhance communication and understanding among groups of humans.

> My interpretive interest in [a particular case study] is piqued not merely because he exists nor because he is exotic, but because my ability to grasp the logic of his view might open my thinking to new possibilities for action and more constructive contact between [him] and people like me. (Eisenhart, 1998, p. 393)

As much as this study proposes to stand as a successful academic work, it is about understanding real people and taking action concerning the real problems they face. Arthur (1998) further supports this stance, suggesting that "Potential biases of traditional research paradigms may include an overemphasis on... the legacy of exploitation that occurs when the results of research fail to contribute to the lives of participants" (p. 90). She reminds us as researchers that our work exists for the benefit of our subjects, and not the other way around.

Meacham (1998), responding supportively to Eisenhart's (1998) article, points to the strength of interpretive research vis-à-vis the ". . . increased conceptual demands underlying today's educational issues" (p. 402). He suggests that current research faces ". . . a crisis of representation [in which] . . . we are frequently unable to conceptualize and represent the interconnected space of which our present global ethos is constituted" (p. 401). He points out that traditional philosophies of research have tended to assume and formulate a distance between the observer and the observed, and that the nature of today's world renders such approaches inappropriate:

> The space of our global ethos. . . is a space characterized, not by distance, but immersion, and radical interconnection. There are no insular spaces set apart from the effects of global migration, the commodification and consumption of cultural images, and the multifaceted connections of the Internet. The critical observer does not stand apart from these processes. (p. 401)

Clearly, his emphasis on the interconnectedness characterizing the way we live represents a strong ecological bias.

Meacham (1998) goes on to warn against what he terms a "conceit" inherent in Eisenhart's (1998) article. He suggests that interpretive researchers should guard against a tendency to take on the role of "translator for mainstream readers" (p. 402). The concern he identifies is that, in assuming that role, the researcher assumes a stance with the reader, and conceptually apart from the observed, who is thus "othered". And this, insists Meacham, tends to limit the ways in which the researcher presents the observed, and therefore dilutes the effectiveness of the interpretive process:

> The researcher [thus] is confined to representing her or his work in a manner which replicates the spatial parameters and reinforces the perceptual habits of mainstream readers. A representational device which achieves this outcome, is the invisibility of the researcher within the translation process. This invisibility implicitly maintains the illusion of the mainstream as universal. Through researcher invisibility or cultural neutrality, mainstream readers are confronted neither with the cultural specificity of the representation, nor with the specificity of their own interpretations. The assumption is that they are receiving a real picture of the culture under investigation. (p. 403)

He warns against any research process which distances the researcher from the observed: "We are all immersed within processes which are connected to and constitutive of the disparities and inequalities which characterize the educational landscape" (p. 405). Clearly, to Meacham, in the ecosystem of the educational landscape, the researcher is an integral and interrelated organism, and not merely someone outside the fence looking in.

Metaphorically, Meacham (1998) suggests that interpretive review is best viewed as a "weave" rather than the wall envisioned by Eisenhart (1998). To Meacham, the efforts of the researcher are but interwoven strands, integral with the rest of the tapestry. Ultimately, to the extent that Meacham critiques Eisenhart, his arguments strengthen and extend her stance in favour of the validity of the interpretive review. They walk through the forest together.

Schwandt (1998) also shares Eisenhart's path through the bush. He suggests her ideas are wonderful "... if only for the fact that the kind of reviews she advocates would be a welcome antidote to the terminally boring recital or catalog of previous studies (particularly in dissertations) that reads like a 'litany to the ancestors'" (p. 410). Schwandt's comment is not mere frivolity. Implicit is the notion that research, if it is to be effective, must be dynamic and stimulating rather than static and soporific.

In support of Eisenhart's (1998) position concerning interpretive reviews, Schwandt (1998) suggests we evaluate the assumptions on which we base our theories of education. On the one hand is a modernistic view that education is a "... deliberate human enterprise that aims to empower or equip individuals to confront the world, solve problems, increase their social mobility, obtain a better job, and so on" (p. 410). From this stance, posits Schwandt, the role of research is to "settle issues", and the traditional form of literature review is useful in that it allows us to attain a clearer view of the various issues to be resolved.

On the other hand, Schwandt (1998) puts forth the notion that education is not a static enterprise which merely comprises a set of controlled activities in which we acquire knowledge as an instrument of control.

> Knowledge of educational phenomona cannot be
> reduced to a scientific model which limits knowledge to

> the objective verification of regularities and where our situated selves have no bearing on what constitutes knowledge. To understand what it means to educate (and what it means to do educational inquiry) is to participate in the cultivation and acquisition of practical wisdom. Therefore, as a process of this kind, education is interpretation, it involves self-understanding, and its purpose is to make us more human. (p. 411)

In this dynamic world of continual and continuous change, it is difficult to envision a time or place in which issues can be said to be truly and finally resolved. If, as Schwandt proposes, the purpose of education is to make us more human, we need, therefore, to accept that "Becoming so is an unending task, because it can never be achieved once and for all. Self-understanding is, thus, not something we acquire as a result of education, rather it is an ongoing and constant process" (p. 411). And thus, suggests Schwandt, there is a need for a form of research that is dynamic and interpretive.

At this point, a disclaiming statement is in order. In advocating for the justification of the interpretive review as this study's method of choice, it is important to note that the denigration of more traditional methodological paradigms is definitely not implied. This should be clear from the metaphors frequently put forth. Just as there would be no tapestry without strongly woven strands, no wall without solidly formed stones, and no forest without healthy trees, there would be no interpretive review without the myriad discrete and rigorous research projects which comprise the content of the review. This study would be incomplete without gratefully acknowledging the contribution of dozens of individual works cited herein, many of which are excellent in terms of their traditional rigor.

But from time to time, it is worthwhile to look at the whole tapestry, the whole wall, or the whole forest, to see whether the individual pieces are fitting together as well as they might to form a strong, healthy or vibrant whole. That, in essence, is the intent of this study.

Inclusion of the interpretive function in research seems to presuppose someone, or ones, assuming the interpreter role. To return to the earlier discussion concerning the quantitative-qualitative debate, Oberle (1991) points out:

> [Researchers] have demonstrated that science is not value free; that social forces play an essential role in how observations are made and interpreted; and that progress in science may be defined in many different ways. Philosophers of science have defined a new epistemology that recognizes the role of human interactions in scientific endeavor. . . . The assumption for human science is of an underlying pattern or structure of human behavior, a pattern that is not immutable, but socially constructed. (p. 95)

Clearly, the researcher plays a key role in observing and interpreting. Meloy (1994), writing from a qualitative stance, acknowledges the researcher as "a human instrument," stating: "Researchers reveal themselves to be conscious, interactive sensemakers. What makes sense to one may not make sense to another, but the choices and decisions made are grounded in the individual's perceptions of his or her focus and overall research purpose" (p. 4).

To return to our silvacultural metaphor, no two researchers will choose the same path through the woods. Some will look widely around, evaluating the panoramic vista. Others will peer closely at minute details. And some may blunder about blindly, not looking at all where they are going (present researcher excepted, hopefully). In strolling through the forest, no matter how carefully the researcher may tread, contextual interaction of significant effect will occur. Branches will be bent or broken, spider webs will be damaged, worms will be stepped on, and carbon dioxide will be exchanged for oxygen.

Indeed, it is not only unavoidable, but also necessary, that researchers exert considerable personal influence on the outcomes of a given study, suggests Kilbourn (1999). He speaks of the need for authors of research to demonstrate "self-conscious method":

> The author should, in some way, make clear her or his sensitivity to the conceptual and methodological moves made during the conduct of the study and in the presentation of the study as a readable document. The author should show an awareness of the bearing of those moves on the overall integrity of the work, should be able to give *good reason* for making them. (p. 28)

To extend a point made earlier in this chapter, Meacham (1998) warns the researcher against "othering" the researched, through intentionally striving to attain a position of invisibility:

> Through researcher invisibility or cultural neutrality, mainstream readers are confronted neither with the cultural specificity of the representations, nor with the specificity of their own interpretations. The assumption is that they are receiving a real picture of the culture under investigation. (p. 403)

A photograph of a tree is meaningless unless the photographer identifies it within the context of its surroundings, together with an account of the photographer's own selection criteria, and the photographic technique utilized.

Clearly, however, the photograph is equally meaningless until it is viewed by others through the lenses of their own contexts. Similarly, to the crucial extent that research involves communication, the second phase of the interpretive process comprises the unique and unavoidable perceptions of the reader. As Meloy (1994) says,

> Each individual reader will bring his or her own experiences and expectations to [a particular work]. . . . Our cognition and feelings combine in ways that enable us as individuals to regard our contemporary experiencing from a variety of perspectives, and hence judge it, hone it, foster it, or reshape it. Depending on who the reader is and his or her individual context, certain episodes will 'mean' more than others, and certain caveats or suggestions will seem more salient. (p. xiv)

Thus, the interpretive function of the reader is ineluctably interrelated to that of the researcher; their lenses continually focusing in complementary ways.

To carry the botanical metaphor further, then, envision a bus tour through the forest. The driver (the researcher) has the job of choosing the route, pointing out the environmental features, and keeping the windows clean. The vehicle itself (the research format and presentation) must be of adequate condition and appropriate design to carry the passengers throughout the terrain, while affording them a good view. The passengers (the readers) are encouraged to smell the flowers, listen to the birds, peer at the trees through magnifying lenses, binoculars, or their bare eyes, and compare the scenery with that in their own back yards.

## Methodological Delineation of this Study

At this point, the necessity remains to relate this specific study to the theoretical foundations of the research review format in general, with special reference to the interpretive function. It is important for our tour participants to ask some inevitable questions: Who is driving the bus? What is his background, and what are his credentials? Why did he choose this particular vehicle? Why did he choose this particular route through this particular forest? A methodological outline of an interpretive study must address issues of the researcher's ". . . awareness of his or her role as a writer with a biography" (Kilbourn, 1999, p. 28), and thus acknowledge the role the researcher's biases and contextual background play in the interpretive function. Some self-disclosure, together with recourse to the first-person singular pronoun, is therefore in order.

As an interpretive researcher, I bring to this study biases developed over some 35 years of experience with transescent youngsters through various professional roles, including summer camp staff member, public school elementary teacher and administrator, and most recently, elementary school counsellor. I am the father of three children, one of whom (currently) is an adolescent, and two of whom are transescents.

One bias I bring to this study is a general concern about the number of youngsters who express to me, directly or indirectly, dissatisfaction about their lives, their participation in school programs, their relationships with the adult professionals in their schools, and their inability to make happy and safe choices. This concern has evolved into a vague but pervasive sense of dissatisfaction with some of the outcomes of the jobs we do as professional educators. And yet, as a counsellor, often I have perceived that youngsters are comfortable with me, and are willing to trust me with their most personal experiences and feelings. Occasionally, they have told me that I am cool. I often find myself wondering what that means, and wondering how youngsters' perceptions about my coolness affects the extent to which my interactions with them are effective.

The appearance of Danesi's (1994) book, *Cool: The Signs and Meanings of*

*Adolescence*, happened during the time I was seeking to define a thesis topic. It was a significant moment, in that Danesi's work immediately provided me with a conceptual framework against which to measure many of the questions and concerns I had compiled over the years with respect to transescent culture, attitude, behaviour, and problems--issues that have always comprised the essence of the challenges inherent in my professional work. The conversion of Danesi's ideas into a coherent theme appropriate to a thesis topic was indeed long, tortuous, frustrating--and occasionally rewarding. Meloy's (1994) comments seem prescient:

> Determining a focus in... research usually includes examining and reexamining the research context, changing one's mind, and giving up preconceived notions of what is important.... Understanding the focus occurs nearer to the middle and the end--as opposed to the beginning--of the inquiry. Finding focus is intimately linked to who an individual is as well as to how he or she thinks and what there is to think about. A focus may 'emerge' from context, but it actually takes shape as a result of how an individual looks at a given context, what is perceived, and what that individual determines to do with all of that "stuff." (p. 53)

Meloy's explication of how focus "emerges" through individual interpretation is inherently systemic, and in keeping with Eisenhart's (1998) vision. With respect to the identification of this study's method, it was thus a matter of evolutionary imperative. The unique nature of the topic's substance seemed to me to demand a blending of Cooper's (1982, 1998) methodological rigor with Eisenhart's resounding call for disruption to conventional thinking. Neither approach, by itself, seemed equal to the challenge. As Shulman (1988) says,

> One of the enduring problems in research methodology has been the tendency to treat selection of method as primarily a technical question not associated with the underlying theoretical or substantive rationale of the research to be conducted.
>
> Selecting the method most appropriate for a particular disciplined inquiry is one of the most important and difficult responsibilities of a researcher. The choice requires an act of judgment, grounded in both knowledge of methodology and the substantive area of the investigation. (p. 13)

In my judgment, the best methodological strategy for this study was to combine the two approaches.

Using Danesi's (1994) notions as a focal point around which to cluster and examine the work of others, the process of developing this study involved procuring and reading literally hundreds of articles and books--a ponderous pile of paper--relating to the myriad issues, problems and characteristics of transescent youth. For the academic literature, which comprises the majority of sources cited, I developed a matrix of Expert Keywords, based on ideas gleaned from Danesi's work, to order the search process. I limited the search to one database, *The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)*, because the focus of this review is the educational significance of coolness and the culture of teenagerhood, and I found *ERIC* to be the most appropriate source for that information.

Beyond the criterion that items selected should have emerged recently, (within the last five to ten years,) the main and enduring search parameter comprised some reference to preadolescence or early adolescence vis-à-vis three broad topical realms: (a) Innate or Developmental Attributes, (b) External Influences, and (c) Behavours. Some were "problems" or "risks" as identified, for example, by McWhirter et al. (1993). Others were innate characteristics, developmental or social, of the transescent age group. And still others involved current school practice. Examples of topics or issues searched included substance use, sexuality, smoking, rock music, suicide, violence, gangs, self-esteem, body image, clothing, risk-taking, peer relationships, cliques, family influence, mass media, school counselling, and school dropout. (For a complete representation of the Expert Keyword Search Matrix, please see Appendix A. Additionally, an Expert Keyword Search Matrix for methodological sources is presented in Appendix B.)

Perusal of abstracts led me to the issue of selection. A major criterion I chose involved the extent to which, in my subjective interpretation, the article or book appeared to relate meaningfully to the lives of real youngsters; could I, or could my colleagues, make direct use of the information presented to inform our professional practice? Kraizer's (1990) suggestion that we should focus less on problems, and more on the processes by which our youngsters develop problems became an additional cornerstone of the selection process. This also was a function of my interpretive role.

It must be stated that of the selections of literature that were examined throughout this study, not all were characterized by academic rigor. Their inclusion is intentional and important. In some cases, selections were chosen because they are representative of the cultural language employed. Some of the linguistic symbols of coolness are ephemeral--quick to emerge, quick to fade away, and perhaps in the process, ultimately to be overlooked in the processes of academic research. To the extent that popular literature may be construed by some readers as "cool" in and of itself, its inclusion in an ecological study is necessary. In this regard, the medium may well be the message. This is part of the ecological view this study hopes to attain. The forest comprises weeds as well as trees, and the weeds and the trees are interrelated. Additionally, Eisenhart's (1998) notions of the legitimacy of "the review as groundswell" and of "disrupting conventional thinking" surely influenced my selection process. I admit frankly to including articles which featured innovative or unconventional insights. This was neither capriciousness nor radicalism, in light of the goals defined at the outset of this study.

Ultimately and increasingly, (to return to Meacham's [1998] metaphor), threads of significance picked from the pages of the selected literature, joined to form strands of meaning. These, in turn, twined together to become the warp and weft representing this study's predominant themes. The challenge became to weave a coherent tapestry. I cannot claim to have agreed personally with all of the literature selected, as evidenced by the fact that opposing views have been examined and discussed, as time and space allowed, in this study.

Indeed, it must be stated that the interpretive function inherent in the selection process involved more exclusion than inclusion, and was more extensive than intensive. In terms of scope, the topic of this study is immense--the forest is huge. In terms of time, new developments, as documented in the literature, are emerging continuously; the forest changes by the moment. It cannot truly be said that this study is complete, nor can it ever be. The biggest challenge to the interpretive role lay in the need to bring an end to the process of the selection of literature.

In the production of this paper, which represents the outcome of this study, (the tapestry), my use of language begs comment. Slade's (1997) guidelines are clear enough:

> The diction in a research paper should be formal rather than colloquial. Slang generally has no place in a research paper, nor does the relatively imprecise diction of casual conversation. . . . Your tone, or

> attitude toward your subject, should be serious, not ironic or flippant. Humorous, casual, or conversational approaches are usually inappropriate for research papers. Furthermore, they are usually ineffective because they conflict with your audience's expectations concerning research writing. Given that your purpose is to promote understanding of your subject, you will not want to use a tone that can easily be misinterpreted. (p. 78)

But to the extent that this paper occasionally contravene's Slades guidelines, it is in keeping, hopefully, with the spirit of Eisenhart's (1998) assertions that it is acceptable to be "surprising, startling, and new" (p. 392), and that we are justified in committing ourselves ". . . to use research findings to improve communication and understanding across human groups" (p. 393). To reiterate an earlier disclaimer, no disrespect is intended, inasmuch as Eisenhart's notions concerning research undoubtedly are not intended to be negatively destructive.

Again, Meacham's (1998) comments pertaining to the need to avoid "othering" the researched are salient. I have chosen to try to bridge the gap between the reader and the observed by modelling, at least in a rudimentary fashion, some linguistic nuances of the cultural context under study. Danesi (1994) acknowledges the importance of humour within the culture of teenagerhood: "The ability to construct ironic verbal texts allows the adolescent to confront problems and to present the self in tactful ways" (p. 55). If, in the same way, I present this paper in a manner which communicates more effectively in terms of its readability, then I have succeeded in rendering it more useful.

Clearly, in the development of this study's five stages, (as outlined by Cooper, 1982,) I made many decisions which have affected the final shape and substance of this paper. Does the finished product fit--indeed, can it fit--into the broad population of acceptable academic research?

Returning to Cooper (1985), he lists broad types of literature reviews according to their foci and goals. These include (a) sizing up new substantive or methodological developments, or both, in a given field, (b) verifying existing theories or developing new ones, (c) synthesizing knowledge from differing lines of research, (d) inferring generalizations about substantive issues from studies bearing on those issues, (e) highlighting important issues that research has not resolved, and (f) replacing studies that have fallen behind the research front (p. 8).

Cooper's (1985) definition is indeed broad, and to the extent it may be judged as amorphous, he proposes a more systematic and utilitarian taxonomy for classifying literature reviews according to their major characteristics. His taxonomy comprises six characteristics, each including a number of categories. They are worth examining at length, in that they represent a useful standard against which this study will be delineated.

1. Focus. This comprises the broad types of material that are of concern to the researcher. Cooper (1985) delineates four focal areas: (a) research outcomes,

(b) research methods, (c) theories, and (d) practices or applications. These, he suggests, are not mutually exclusive, but tend to overlap within a given study.

2. Goals. These comprise what a researcher hopes to accomplish within the review. The most obvious and common goal, suggests Cooper (1985) is to integrate or synthesize past literature vis-à-vis a particular issue. This goal may include formulating general statements from several specific instances, resolving conflicts between contradictory ideas by offering new explanations, or bridging a gap between theories by developing a common linguistic framework. Other goals include critical analysis of existing literature, usually to disprove past conclusions, and identification of issues central to a particular field. Again, as with foci, goals are not mutually exclusive, and a given study may have multiple goals.

3. Perspective. This is the point of view employed by the researcher. Cooper (1985) lists two. The first is neutral or dispassionate; the second is espousal or advocacy of a particular stance or point of view. Although these stances are essentially opposite, he suggests they be viewed as opposite ends of a single continuum, rather than as discrete and unconnected positions.

4. Coverage. This characteristic, which Cooper (1985) identifies as the most distinct and essential aspect of literature reviewing, is the extent to which reviewers locate and include appropriate works in their studies. He identifies

four approaches: (a) exhaustive coverage, in which the researcher purports to include all available literature, although not necessarily in great detail, (b) exhaustive with selective citation, in which all literature is considered, but with only a sample of the complete range cited, (c) representative coverage, in which samples are selected for citation based on the extent to which they typify categories from which they were chosen, and (d) central or pivotal coverage, which features new or heuristic selections, or items which engender significant debate.

5. Organization. This relates to how the items or ideas included in the review are ordered for presentation. Cooper (1985) lists three approaches: (a) historically, in which topics are viewed chronologically, (b) conceptually, in which works relating to similar abstract ideas are grouped, and (c) methodologically, in which works employing similar methods are considered together. These categories are not mutually exclusive, and may overlap, perhaps with one as the principal category, and the others as subcategories.

6. Audience. This concerns the group of readers to whom the researcher chooses to present the material. Cooper (1985) identifies four possible target audiences: (a) specialized scholars, (b) general scholars, (c) practitioners or policy makers, and (d) the general public. The researcher's writing style is significant with respect to audience, and particular papers, which may contain essentially the same material, may appear different because of stylistic variations aimed at

different audiences (pp. 9-14).

It remains for this researcher to describe this study in accordance with Cooper's (1985) taxonomy. Cooper provides a disclaimer which apparently suggests that his ideas be applied with some sense of flexibility: "More important than the creation of any single, uniform scheme for describing reviews is that authors of reviews thoroughly describe the intent and nature of their work, in whatever terms make them comfortable" (p. 30). Notwithstanding, Cooper's taxonomy is appealing in its conciseness, and at the risk of being redundant because much of this study's nature has been expressed elsewhere in these pages, I will attempt to explicate this study in Cooper's terms. (For clarity, Cooper's terminology will be italicized.)

Concerning *Focus,* that part of this review which discusses youth, teenagerhood and coolness, and the efforts of our schools to address issues of risky behaviour, clearly involves both *theories* and *practices or applications*. However, inasmuch as the Method chapter includes several references to methodological sources, this study also addresses *research methods.*

With respect to *Goal,* this study attempts to *integrate* ideas in the literature relating to young adolescents, and with particular reference to Danesi's (1994) ideas, to *bridge a gap between theory and practice by proposing a common linguistic framework*--the language of teenagerhood and coolness. Concerning methodology, this study attempts to *integrate* much of the literature pertaining to the integrative-interpretive review format, but also attempts to *identify an issue central to a field, particularly one which has tended to prevent a topic area from progressing*--referring specifically to the methodological choice of integrative-interpretive review.

Regarding *Perspective*, this review admits frankly to *espouse* a number of specific positions, including the legitimacy of a combined integrative and interpretive review format, of Danesi's (1994) theories of teenagerhood and coolness, and of the need for schools, and educational counsellors in particular, to be willing to review their practices in light of the work of a number of theorists, including Danesi.

Pertaining to *Coverage*, this study has attempted to be *representative* overall, given constraints with respect to time and space. Concerning a few specific items, notably Cooper's (1982, 1985, 1998) and Eisenhart's (1998) stances on research reviews, and Danesi's (1994) work on the culture of teenagerhood and coolness, this study adopts a *central or pivotal* approach.

As to *Organization*, the ideas presented herein, with respect both to method, and to content, are arranged generally in a *conceptual* fashion.

Concerning *Audience*, inasmuch as this study purports to comprise a Master's thesis, it is written for the consideration of *specialized scholars*. But the point has been proposed throughout this paper that the problem of youngsters at risk concerns real people--your children and mine. With this thought in mind, I confess to harbouring some hope that ultimately, some of the ideas presented herein may someday come to the attention of *practitioners or policy makers,* and the *general public.* The occasional use of metaphor and colloquial language is undoubtedly significant with respect to this point.

For a more concise delineation of this study in accordance with Cooper's (1985) Taxonomy of Literature Reviews, please see TABLE 1, (p. 51).

With respect to using his taxonomy to evaluate the quality or effectiveness of scholastic literature reviews, Cooper (1985) summarizes:

> Diverse types of reviews exist and there is no reason to believe one type is intrinsically more valuable or valid than another. General discussions of review quality, therefore, will employ criteria of a highly abstract nature, leaving much to the judgment of the individual assessor. (p. 26)

He proposes three criteria for judging the quality of the type of synthesis which should emerge from an effective review: (a) the tendency of the synthesis to clarify and resolve, rather than obscure and create inconsistencies among the materials synthesized, (b) the ability of the synthesis to explain and predict, suggest application, and identify unsolved problems, and (c) the extent to which the synthesis satisfies established criteria for good theories, including consistency, parsimony, elegance, and fruitfulness.

TABLE 1

**Categorization of This Study in Accordance with Cooper's (1985) Taxonomy of Literature Reviews**

| Characteristic | Categorization |
|---|---|
| Focus: | • Theories<br>• Practices / Applications<br>• Research Methods |
| Goal: | • Integration--Linguistic Bridge-building<br>• Identification of Central Issues--Methodological Problems that have Prevented a Topic Area from Progressing |
| Perspective: | • Espousal of Position |
| Coverage: | • Representative (overall)<br>• Central or Pivotal (specific areas) |
| Organization: | • Conceptual |
| Audience: | • Specialized Scholars (primary audience)<br>• Practitioners / Policy Makers (potential secondary audience)<br>• General Public (potential secondary audience) |

Clearly, Cooper's (1985) evaluative criteria are not exclusive to those of Mauch and Birch (1998), who state "The criterion measure of appropriateness is whether or not the methodology will yield *useful* [italics added] evidence with regard to the statement of the problem (p. 123). Again, to reiterate, the stated "problem" concerns real youngsters, rather than academic abstractions. They are your children, and mine. Ultimately, the end product of this study hopes to comprise what Benson, Sporakowski, and Stremmel (1992) term "a synthesis"--a topographical map of the ecosystem--a chart which leads us to attain Kraizer's (1990) "hope and goal" listed in the opening paragraph of Chapter 1.

# CHAPTER 4

## Cool -- The History, the Signs and Symbols, and the Risks

> Like never before, the teenager of today is projected into a confused, often violent and dangerous, subculture that all too frequently extols destructiveness. Becoming cool allows him or her to cope within this subculture. It has become abundantly clear to me that understanding how teenagers think and behave has become crucial for charting the future course of our social and moral traditions.
>
> (Danesi, 1994)

Surely the word *cool* is one of the most ubiquitous within the argot of teenagers. Yet, until recently, few studies appear to have focused on coolness and its significance to the culture of adolescence. Is it, indeed, legitimate to refer to teenagerhood as a discrete culture?

Recently, Marcel Danesi, a Toronto semiotician who has spent years observing and reporting on teenage behaviours, took on the task of responding to these issues. Danesi's (1994) book, *Cool: The Signs and Meanings of Adolescence,* defines coolness as the central behavioural trait of adolescence. Beginning with the emergence historically of coolness as a discrete construct, he discusses how it develops among teens through a process he calls "signifying osmosis": ". . . a term referring to the osmotic assimilation of behaviour as it unfolds in relation to socially meaningful, or *signifying* stimuli" (p. 45). Coolness, according to Danesi, affects--and is affected by--such issues as body image, clique formation, posture and facial expressions, dress codes, musical preferences, substance use, and language. He concludes his work with some comments pertaining to the future of teenagerhood. Offering insightful perceptions about adolescent culture, Danesi's work may prove to be worth exploring in detail, vis-à-vis the sporadic research concerning this fascinating developmental stage, particularly as it may offer a viable stance from which to address the many serious issues facing young teens today.

## The History of Teenagerhood and the Emergence of *Cool*

Frustrated parents, or professional practitioners, might wonder if the human race has ever been free of that often-challenging sub-species, the teenager. Possibly not. Danesi (1994) tells of an ancient Sumerian letter, carved in cuneiform on a stone tablet, noted by the early Greek historian, Herodotus. This letter

> . . . describes a young boy excused by his over-indulgent father from working in the fields. Having nothing important to do after school, the idle Sumerian adolescent wandered about the streets, loitered in the public square, sought pleasure, answered his father in an insolent manner, appeared indifferent towards his future, and seemed to have no disposition whatsoever to follow in his father's footsteps. (p. x)

If we substitute "mall" for "public square", those of us with teenaged youngsters should be able to relate easily to this snapshot.

It's easy perhaps for adults, from their lofty perspective, to write off the stance of our Sumerian teen as "just a rebellious stage he's going through." Lesko (1996), however, warns against this view, stating:

> . . . in a society that proclaims the superiority of adults, children and youth must become like adults or disappear. . . . Most often when conflict between adolescents and adults is described, teenagers are defined as rebellious, that is, the source of the conflict is *within them* [italics added]. The concrete interactions of rebellious youth with adults are seldom make [sic] visible, so that the simple, unitary description of teenagers as rebellious stands. (pp. 467-468)

Rebellious is a relative term, and assumes the superiority of the stance against which the rebelliousness is directed. Lesko goes on to suggest that we need to reject the simplistic notion that teens are rebellious, emotional or hormonally driven--and thereby inferior--and replace it with a research-driven definition of children and youth as complex social participants whose aspirations and cultural attainments are rightful and appropriate, (however objectionable they may appear to the prevailing adults).

Brendtro et al. (1998) similarly propose a more respectful view of youth, suggesting that we should use caution in applying labels to our younger generation:

> We have used different descriptors depending on the focus of discussion. The concept of "at risk," although very broad, avoids blaming the child and points our attention toward the environmental hazards that need to be addressed. We have used the terms "alienated"

> and "troubled" to emphasize what it feels like to be alone and in conflict. Adults often view these youth as "difficult" to work with and "reluctant" to accept help. (p. 3)

There certainly appears to be a sense of respect in their outlook toward young people.

Danesi's (1994) stance tends to align with that of Lesko (1996) and Brendtro et al. (1998). Comparing the Sumerian teen with youngsters today, he notes that while the behaviour portrayed is not new, the teenager of today is essentially different from the Sumerian predecessor, in that ". . . he or she has developed a new social *persona* within a cultural context which allows and encourages its maintenance and evolution" (p. x). To the extent that this social persona embodies coolness, we must become familiar with the cultural context if we wish to understand what coolness is all about. Danesi summarizes:

> Indeed, teenagerhood is implanted in a psychosocial time-frame that channels the physiological and emotional changes that occur at puberty into peer-shaped and peer-sanctioned patterns of symbolic behaviour. These patterns are then reinforced in our culture by the media. (p. xi)

The cultural context of coolness, then, comprises physiological, emotional, social, and behavioural dimensions. Gecas and Seff (1990) affirm the increasing trend in recent years to study adolescence in terms of social context as well as individual development (p. 941), and thus lends credence to Danesi's views.

As to *cool*, (the word itself), Danesi (1994) traces its roots to rather specific historical antecedents. Emerging from the jazz club scene in the 1930s, *cool* originally referred to the practice of opening doors and windows to allow cool air to freshen the smoky, warm, club atmosphere. Use of the term broadened to describe the smooth slow jazz style which developed during that era, and ultimately, use of the descriptor extended to any physically attractive proponent of the jazz scene, whether fan or performer (p. 37). It's worth mentioning that the close connections between coolness and popular music, and between coolness and physical attractiveness, are relevant, as will be explained below.

Danesi (1994) notes, incidentally, that the development of the word *cool* in this context actually predates the appearance of the ubiquitous term, *teenager*, which didn't come into common use until the mid 1940s ( p. 6).

If we are to understand how coolness came to be an essential focus of adolescent culture, Danesi (1994) believes we must appreciate how our perceptions of teenagerhood have evolved. A comprehensive overview of the historical development of adolescent theories is well beyond the scope of this study, and probably redundant, inasmuch as textbooks focusing on adolescence abound. However, according to Danesi, a few relevant citations are worth noting. He points out how Hall (1904) became one of the first to identify adolescence as a specific stage, worthy of study, in human development. Many studies of Hall's hypothesis have followed. While there has been general concurrence that puberty marks the onset of adolescence, there has been no clear agreement on what being a teenager really means. Danesi points out that where Hall, for example, believed that adolescence was a period of stress and storm, Mead (1950) found that Hall's perceptions did not fit within the Samoan society she observed. It was not until the 1950s that ". . . the crystallization of the teenage persona and of its supporting subculture. . ." (Danesi, p. 14) came about, primarily in the Western world.

Doherty (1988) suggests that burgeoning affluence among a booming population of young people following World War II, together with the aggressive efforts of a perceptive and opportunistic marketplace, had a lot to do with the development of the subculture of teenagerhood:

> Truth to tell, '50s teenagers *were* strange creatures, set apart from previous generations of American young people in numbers, affluence, and self-consciousness. There were more of them, they had more money, and they were more aware of themselves as teenagers. (p. 45)

With respect to this subculture, Danesi (1994) lists several characteristic phenomena, previously non-existent, which emerged in the media during the 1950s. The first magazines focusing exclusively on the teenage image appeared; Doherty lists over fifteen titles which appeared in the late 1950s and early 1960s (p. 58). Movies began seriously to target the teen market--a trend which, according to Doherty, continues to this day; he speaks of "the industry's flagship enterprise, the teenpic" (p. 3). In the world of music, hit parades began to reflect burgeoning teenage musical tastes, rather than those of adult listeners. Danesi summarizes:

> With the rise of television and of the record industry in the fifties, white, middle-class teenagers were soon courted by the media, because of the amount of leisure time they had and their propensity to consume and spend. By the mid fifties the courtship of the teenage consumer by the media and various entertainment industries (especially the record and movie ones) began in full earnest. (p. 18)

This was not simply a linear, cause-and-effect process, suggests Frank (1997), but one of ecological essence. Teenagerhood was evolving, but, in a mutually dependent way, so was capitalism:

> When business leaders cast their gaze onto the youth culture bubbling around them, they saw both a reflection of their own struggle against the stifling bureaucracy of the past and an affirmation of a dynamic new consuming order that would replace the old. For these business thinkers, the cultural revolution that has come to be symbolized by the counter culture seemed an affirmation of their own revolutionary faiths, a reflection of their own struggles to call their corporate colleagues into step with the chaotic and frenetically changing economic universe. (p. 28)

It is a key point, not only underscoring Danesi's position that teenagerhood must be viewed against a broad social context, but also emphasizing the importance for adopting a systemic and ecological approach when considering the trials and tribulations of our younger generation.

Notwithstanding, the link between the quest for coolness among teens and the greed of the marketplace cannot be overstated, suggests a recent article in *The Vancouver Sun*, (Ward, 1999, October 30):

> In our commercial culture, coolness is everything. And everything can be cool. These days image, brand names, publicity strategies and media buzz are everything in the search for the New New Big Big Thing. The product is almost secondary. . . . Kids are into new brands, new clothes, new badges. They are totally into trends. And if a kid commits to a brand early, companies hope, they may establish brand loyalty early and keep it to the grave. (p. A1)

Ward's article identifies four stages, together with their titular proponents, in the "life cycle of a trend". To the extent that this model describes how coolness develops, it is worth citing at length:

> Trends often start with. . . Bleeding Edgers, who belong to miniscule and elusive sub-cultures on society's margins. They are wacky (read: cool) because that's their nature, not because they're trying to create a trend. . . . A second, slightly larger group [are] the Innovators who consciously want to be ahead of everybody else. . . . The next group are the Late Bloomers who want to be ahead of the curve but are far less willing to do it on their own. They are less likely to create a trend than to pick it up. Which brings us to the final group, those in the Mainstream, people who want to know that everybody else is doing it. . . . By the time the trend is embraced by this majority group, the Bleeding Edgers and the Innovators have moved on to

> something else. This is another axiom of cool. (p. A2)

He goes on to point out that strategies in the marketplace follow this cycle, which is representative of our personal quests for self-identity, in order to sell products. Focusing specifically on the 1960s, Frank (1997) succinctly agrees:

> Mainstream culture was tepid, mechanical, and uniform; the revolt of the young against it was a joyous and even a glorious cultural flowering, though it quickly became mainstream itself. . . . The story ends with the noble idealism of the New Left in ruins and the counterculture sold out to Hollywood and the television networks. (p. 5)

We spend money on trendy items ". . . to express our individuality. Problem is, everybody else is doing it. This is the circular logic of coolness" (Ward, p. A23). We want to be cool to stand out from the crowd, but we want to be cool also so we don't appear to be the odd one out. And, as consumers, teens are willing to spend big bucks to prove it.

Of particular note, with respect to the media, Danesi (1994) points to the birth of rock and roll music, which, with its own "mythical heroes" (p. 19), comprises the essence of teen culture. And heading the list, the incomparable Elvis Presley! Danesi identifies Elvis as the premier exemplar of male coolness:

> His bodily movements, facial expressions (especially his peculiar raised lip twitch), hairstyle, verbal drawl, became the discrete features of coolness for male teens. . . . Since Elvis' death in 1977, the 'king of rock and roll'

> lives on as a myth, worshipped and venerated through television serials, Elvis impersonators, reissues of his records, and memorabilia. Such is the emotive force of teenagerhood. Long after one's teen years have ended, the symbology and behavioural models acquired during this period persist and endure. (pp. 19-20)

Perhaps, in the future, Elvis' role as the king of rock and roll ultimately may be overshadowed by his role as the king of coolness.

The importance of rock and roll music, or as it is more commonly known today, rock music, to the development of adolescent culture cannot be overstated. As Danesi (1994) remarks, "The history of teenagerhood, in all its diversity and complexity, is reflected in the history of rock and roll" (p. 29). Danesi chooses to delineate rock music by decades--the sixties, the seventies, the eighties--and reaffirms that since its inception in the fifties, the music has evolved and changed significantly. Along with it, many of the details pertaining to the culture of adolescence have undergone alterations. Teens grow up and become adults, and the next generation takes their place. Trends affecting the music, and affected by the music, emerge, flourish, and disappear. But rock music, the essence of teenagerhood, endures. In Danesi's words:

> It was becoming increasingly obvious that teenagerhood had developed into a force that was permanently changing the sociology of modern culture. More and more people maintained and cherished their teenage symbology well beyond adolescence. Rock music was becoming more and more mainstream music. Teenage symbologies were becoming

> mainstream symbologies. And while all this was going on, the new generation of teenagers sought out new symbols and codes to keep their identities different from those of the ex-teenagers. (p. 25)

While the history of the advancement of media trends, particularly rock music, vis-à-vis the development of adolescent culture, is fascinating, to explore it in detail would be well beyond the scope of this study. Danesi captures the essence, and his account is well worth reading. The issue at this point in the study is to understand how the media affects, and is affected by, coolness. It is, according to Strasburger (1995), a powerful and significant connection; he suggests that for the first time in history, the symbols that form, and are formed by, our children's culture, originate from the media, and not from parents, church, or school (p. 16).

The Signs, Symbols, and Risks of Coolness

Danesi (1994) contends that the set of attitudes and behaviours which comprise coolness is not finite or limited. Rather, these signs and symbols are variable and dynamic, changing from place to place, from group to group, and from time to time. Notwithstanding, Danesi points out that there is an essence of coolness which endures. Moreover, certain of the signs and symbols, (including the word *cool*), are universally recognized and accepted by teens as invariable (pp. 38-40). What, then, are the behaviours and attitudes--particularly the "essential" ones--which comprise coolness? And additionally, what are the risks?

Again, as a benchmark throughout this chapter, this study will refer frequently to McCreary (1999) to provide some perspective as to how well adult theories match the current practice of today's youth.

Central to coolness, according to Danesi (1994), is a strong sense of body image which begins to emerge near the end of childhood. This indicates the development of social cognition: "The human body is a source of signification. . . . When children become excessively concerned about their physical appearance, then from a social standpoint they have, in effect, become teenagers, even if they have not yet become pubescent" (p. 47). Coolness is synonymous with social attractiveness, whereas its opposite, "loserness", equates with ugliness and alienation (p. 41). Thornton and Ryckman (1991) point out that body image comprises not only physical attractiveness, but also physical effectiveness, including social skills and athletic prowess. And both, they have found, relate to self-esteem. Girls appear to be at greater risk for low self-esteem relating to body image than are boys (Rothenberg, 1995).

To the extent that this process of social cognition comprising coolness tends to emerge near the beginning of adolescence, one cannot overlook the effects brought about by the physiological processes of burgeoning pubescence. Thornton and Ryckman (1991) note that the timing of pubertal development affects components of self-esteem: "Early maturation is associated with greater self-confidence, independence, and gregariousness, while late maturation is associated with greater self-doubt, social anxiety, and a tendency to withdraw from social situations" (p. 86). McCreary (1999), however, adds a cautionary note:

> Both males and females who think they look older are more likely to engage in risky behaviours. . . . Youth who report looking older than their peers may have physically matured early. Others may have made a deliberate effort to appear older. In either case, according to the survey results, youth who perceive themselves as looking older are at higher risk for a variety of health concerns. (p. 33)

Self-esteem, it would appear, does not by itself indicate immunity from risk.

Danesi (1994) sees cool behaviours as defensive ploys to deflect the criticism of peers away from themselves: "The desire to become cool constitutes a defensive behavioural strategy--a strategy designed to transform the physiological and emotional changes that occur at puberty into peer-shaped and peer-acceptable patterns of social behaviour" (p. 43).

First on the list of cool behaviours, according to Danesi (1994), is a preoccupation with, and defensive strategies related to, body size and appearance. Facial blemishes, oversized noses or ears, female facial hair, and eyeglasses tend not to be cool (p. 49). Danesi affirms the notion, reinforced by the media, that ". . . the slim and lean look is a prerequisite for attaining coolness for both males and females" (p. 48). A muscular body is cool for males, as is a relatively large penis; for females, breast size is of concern. McCreary (1999) confirms that British Columbia's youngsters are certainly concerned about their appearance, with over half (52 %) of female students surveyed reporting that they are trying to lose weight, and 27 % of male students reporting that they would like to gain weight (p. 13).

The desire to present a peer-acceptable body image can lead, in extreme cases, to eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia (Levine, Smolak & Hayden, 1994), or to muscle dysmorphia (Pope, Gruber, Choi, Olivardia, & Phillips, 1997) and its oft-concomitant abuse of anabolic steroids (Luetkemeier, Bainbridge, Walker, Brown & Eisenman, 1995). McCreary (1999) reports no particular increase since 1992 in eating disorders among adolescents, and a low rate (2 %) of illegal use of steroids. Notwithstanding, it may be argued that any tendency toward eating disorders or steroid use among our teens is alarming, given the health risks involved.

Strategies designed to deflect peer perceptions, or to camouflage perceived defects, include the use of cosmetics and artificial scents, hair-styles, clothing styles, jewellery (including body-piercing), and tattooing. Eicher, Baizerman and Michelman (1991) indicate that appearance is an important component of communication, even preceding verbal interaction:

> Appearance establishes identity when an individual projects his or her "program" (loosely interpreted as one's social roles of gender, age, and occupation) to others. In turn, the self is validated or challenged

> when the program is "reviewed" by others. (pp. 679-680)

The symbols of communicative appearance are not without their potential hazards; with respect to tattooing, for example, Houghton, Durkin and Carroll (1995) point out several possible areas of risk, including physical, mental, social and economic. And as they point out, "Body markings reflect transient adolescent interests and emotions, but their consequences are permanent" (p. 972).

Although specific styles may change from group to group, from place to place, and from year to year, the need to adopt a peer-sanctioned style in order to be cool does not change. Concerning clothing styles, Danesi (1994) affirms the close association historically between clothing and sexuality, and points out how, since the 1950's, the media have both reflected and influenced teen clothing styles (p. 76). And although specific details of style may come and go, style itself is essential and enduring:

> There would now seem to be a 'meta-code' in teen clothing styles: that is, a generalized model of dress in the teen subculture at large which is an extrapolation and recombination of the specifics of various single-clique fashion props and accoutrements. (p. 79)

Or, as the kids might say, it's cool to wear cool clothes.

Beyond body size and shape, and related stylish adornments, how teens present their bodies through posture, facial expressions, gestures and movement relates to the overall impression which conveys coolness. Again, according to Danesi (1994), there is a close correlation between style and media presentation; teen facial expressions tend to reflect, and are reflected by, those of media stars (pp. 71 - 72). Concerning body movement and coolness, it's noteworthy, according to Danesi, that teens tend to adopt a "slow and lackadaisical form of bodily locomotion, accompanied by a nonchalant and unflappable countenance" (p. 38). It's not cool to be in a hurry, to appear to be embarrassed, or to act timid. Danesi summarizes:

> The sum and substance of coolness is a self-conscious aplomb in overall behaviour. Nothing can upset a cool teen. Everything he or she does unfolds in slow motion, with self-assurance and self-confidence. In the fifties, the expression *cool cat* was often used to describe a socially attractive male teen. The metaphor of the cat is an appropriate one. A cat's languid, sleek, measured movements have the bodily rhythms and modulations that coolness wants to evoke. (p. 38)

The motorist, stuck at an intersection, waiting while teens with sneers on their faces saunter idly across the cross-walk, will surely nod in affirmation.

Put several posturing teens together in a public place, and the result is what Danesi (1994) refers to as "hanging out". This ritual, which may include not only slack and sluggish movements conveying nonchalance and indifference, but also tough aggressive posturing, particularly in the presence of rival peers, is, a sexually based behaviour related to the courtship displays of other creatures (pp.

92-93).

Along with hanging out, which is for teens a relatively public display of coolness, partying is a leading ritual among teens and their peers. As Danesi (1994) states, "The Saturday-night party in particular--where teens can smoke, consume alcohol, tell jokes, and make sexual advances unobserved by adults--allows for the symbology of coolness to unfold in perhaps its most natural context" (p. 66). Inasmuch as puberty comprises the development of sexuality, it's not surprising that many manifestations of coolness tend to be sexual in nature. Danesi sees partying as a sort of tribal mating ritual with rather structured roles and behaviours:

> Acting silly and rude is expected of males, whose roles are perceived to be similar to those of clowns or *pagliacci.* Females, on the other hand, are expected to provide the sexual flirtation signals that produce the comical and exaggerated behaviours in the males--the so-called party animals. (pp. 66-67)

Behaviours related to partying, which have tended to endure as significant within the symbology of coolness, include alcohol and drug consumption, dancing or listening to cool music, and "making out" (engaging in sexual activity) (pp. 61 - 63). Closely related to body image, making out is an important ritual for confirming coolness, in that it is achievable only by those who fit the peer-sanctioned image of body attractiveness (p. 50). Conforming to the norms of the peer-group, as Danesi points out, diverts attention from the individual (p. 43).

Concerning sexual activity among teens, McCreary (1999) reports that, on the average, teens are waiting longer to become sexually active, and that the percentage of students who have ever had sexual intercourse has declined since 1992. However, McCreary warns: "Too many teens still report having sex for the first time at a very early age (9 % at age 13)" (p. 22). Further, warns McCreary, many youngsters who are sexually active are not protecting themselves against sexually-transmitted diseases, with just slightly over half (unchanged since 1992) reporting condom use (p. 23).

With respect to the significance of peer-groups within the culture of teenagerhood, Schroeder-Davis (1992) affirms the tendency of most young adolescents to seek out membership in cliques (p. 56). Danesi (1994) concurs, contending that the function of "cliquing" (p. 56) is to bring together peers whose attainment of coolness is compatible with the abilities, preferences, or attributes of groupmates, and at the same time, to keep others out. According to Danesi, certain types of characteristics influence clique identity. Preferences in rock music, clothing style, and activities, typically are key referents. Danesi lists, for example, eight clique names which he identified as prevalent in Toronto during the the late 1980's: (a) Housers, who identified with house music and the dance club scene connected with it, (b) Rockers, who listened to hard rock bands, and wore the apparel identified with those band members, (c) Mods, who identified with the new wave music of the mid 1980's, (d) Ginos and Ginas, whose ethnic background was Italian, and who wore stylish clothing and listened to disco-type music, (e) Bat Cavers, who were aficionados of the movie *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and who adopted appropriately gothic dress styles, (f) Deadheads, whose music and clothing tastes reverted to 1960's hippie styles, and who were named for The Grateful Dead, (g) B-Boys, who listened to rap music, and wore baseball apparel, and (h) Norms, who did not adopt the symbols of a specific clothing style or musical preference, but who still constituted an identifiable group by not belonging to one of the other cliques, and by congregating in a clique-like manner at social events (pp. 56 - 58). He points out that, while individual cliques are ephemeral, and dependent on time and place, there are always others to take their places when they fade.

As to specific behaviours or qualities which tend to be the norms for coolness among the cliques studied, Danesi (1994) lists several. The extent to which these behaviours or qualities comprise significant risks among our youngsters is well known and well documented (McWhirter et al., 1993). Notwithstanding, Danesi's list is worth reviewing.

Smoking is a widely-spread behaviour among cool wannabes (Danesi, 1994, pp. 85-92). In the face of today's strong public anti-smoking campaigns, the role of smoking apparently endures as essential to sexual attractiveness, and therefore coolness for many young people. As Danesi (1993) says, "The teenager most likely to smoke is the one who desires to enhance his or her attractiveness to peers" (p. 62), and further, " . . . the teenage smoker is generally perceived as having characteristics which are deemed to be social assets, which include 'popularity, disobedience, acting big, and liking to be with a group'" (p. 67). Danesi describes smoking as a socially symbolic act comprising extensive ritualistic behaviours which are clearly gender-coded. He describes the smoking female's bodily schemas as osmotic portrayals of feminine sexuality--sensual, voluptuous, sultry--while those of the smoking male represent masculine sexuality--tough, rough and coarse; altogether, they comprise ". . . a kind of unconscious mating ritual" with the cigarette taking on ". . . a fetishistic quality, with rather obvious phallic connotations" (p. 66).

Fried (1994) points out that adolescents who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and who may be comparatively less educated, are more likely to begin smoking, and further, that females are more likely than males to start smoking, and are less amenable to stopping. She suggests that it is during transescence, ages 10 to 14, that experimentation with tobacco is most likely to begin. Beyond the imperative of peer relationships, Fried lists other factors which tend to relate to teen smoking, including socially desirable media images perpetuated by the tobacco industry, parental or sibling use of tobacco, and the use of nicotine to help with weight control, or stress and mood control. Among British Columbia's youth, McCreary (1999) reports that an average of 45 % of students (unchanged since 1992) have tried smoking, with girls slightly more likely to smoke than are boys. Further, "Efforts to keep teens from trying cigarettes don't appear to be working; programs to help teens quit smoking once they've started may be a better idea" (p. 19). This appears to confirm the importance to young adolescents of experimenting with smoking; prevention programs are ineffective vis-à-vis the imperative of coolness.

Other items on Danesi's (1994) list of cool attributes are not examined to the same detailed extent, but are worth mentioning. Alcohol and drug consumption are viewed as desirable, although this is variable among cliques, and between genders within cliques. McCreary (1999) confirms that for British Columbian youngsters, the rate of alcohol use has not changed since 1992, with binge drinking, (five or more drinks within two hours, during the past month) increasing from 36 % in 1992 to 44 % in 1999 (p. 20). Marijuana use, however, has increased dramatically, up from 25 % in 1992 to 40 % in 1999 (including 10 % of kids aged 13) (p. 21).

Under the broad rubric, rock music, preference for the "right" variety is regarded as a must; related to this, for some cliques, is proficiency in appropriate dance activities. Physical aggression, intimidation and prowess in fighting are seen as important in some cliques. Conformity in dress within cliques prevails, despite a wide variety in styles among various groups (Eicher et al., 1991). For males in many cliques, but not necessarily for females, a critical attribute is sexual promiscuity. ("With whom?" we may therefore wonder; the point doesn't escape Danesi, who notes the apparent hypocrisy therein!) Individuality or "weirdness" is seen as important in one clique, according to Danesi, and although it would seem to contradict the notion of clique-driven conformity, the extent to which each individual strives to be different may be seen to be the uniformity factor characteristic of that clique. Academic achievement is listed as a key attribute, at least for one clique, and more for females than for males. Automobile ownership is seen as an important symbol in at least one clique, and finally, physical appearance in the areas of hairstyle and grooming are significant, although variable among cliques (pp. 60 - 64).

In summary, Danesi (1994) makes the point that, although the categories of appearances and behaviours comprising coolness are fairly standard among cliques, there is considerable variety in the extent to which specific cliques adopt or pursue specific appearances or behaviours. For those who work with teens, this has practical application, according to Danesi: "By knowing which clique a teenager belongs to, the parent or educator will be in a better position to know what kind of activities that teen is likely to engage in" (p. 65). Forewarned is forearmed.

Concerning the significance of individuals' involvement in cliques, Danesi (1994) suggests that clique membership comprises "a 'shelter' system, a closed social network in which the teen can immerse and hide his or her insecure and vulnerable identity" (p. 59). He perceives a sort of Three Musketeers' "All for one, one for all" attitude prevalent among clique members, and warns of its potential danger:

> This attitude can . . . expose the teenager to considerable danger, since it is undergirded by the conviction that 'bad things will happen to others, not to us.' This sense of allegiance can make a teenager feel indestructible and, therefore, oblivious to the perils inherent in the risks that clique members might require of him or her (consuming alcohol and drugs, smoking cigarettes, accepting physical challenges from a member of another clique, etc. (p. 59)

And it is such risk-taking activities that imbue us to encourage our teens to make safe choices.

Further, Danesi (1994) proposes that participation in cliques may well be a key precursor to joining gangs, and may be more influential in that regard than media influence or socio-economic status. He suggests that gangs have become ". . . a widespread phenomenon that cuts across all sociocultural, socio-economic, and regional lines" (p. 65), and one that is no longer characteristic of inner city cultures. Ponce (1990) suggests that gangs can comprise members as young as

13, and "... can begin as early as elementary school and can be really noticeable by middle school" (p. 15). Arnette and Walsleben (1998) point to peer-group identity as the key component enticing vulnerable youngsters to joining gangs:

> Youth who perceive particular deficiencies in their lives often seek to compensate by joining gangs. Offers of a loyal support group of peers, who both understand and value each member in a way that parents and other relatives cannot, attract adolescents in the throes of self-doubt, uncertainty, and feelings of powerlessness. (p. 6)

As to whether a particular youngster chooses membership in a gang because it is seen as a cool clique, or because it is an alternative to being rejected by a cool clique, is not clear. Perhaps what matters is that involvement in gangs, clearly, is a function of the need for many young adolescents to seek identity in some clique or other. And that, in itself, is cool behaviour.

If there are risks in forming cliques, it must also be noted that there are hazards for those youngsters who are not willing, or not able, to establish their membership in a cool group. Those who either decline or fail to seek and attain clique membership risk being ostracized and labelled derogatorily, perhaps as "losers", "dorks", "geeks", or "nerds" (Danesi, 1994, p. 58). It is very difficult, once one is rejected and labelled as a loser or a nerd, to reestablish a positive status with one's peers, and rejected youngsters are at risk for loneliness, delinquency, or adult psychopathology (Merten, 1996). Teens who feel rejected also are at significant risk for cult or Satanic involvement (Rudin, 1990).

Danesi (1994) sees the power of clique symbology as being a major influence in the development of teen violence. Remboldt (1998), lists other factors, including the effect of violent images in the media, and changes in social and economic trends together with their concomitant stress on the family's ability to function. Writing from an American viewpoint, Remboldt suggests that violence among children and adolescents is on the rise. Closer to home, McCreary (1999) is more optimistic. Comparing 1992 data with those of 1999, the report states, "Despite well-publicized incidents of youth violence in recent months, there is no evidence that the lives of B. C. youth are becoming more violent." However, it is noteworthy that the report adds a disclaimer:

> While any potential for adolescent violence is disturbing, the McCreary Centre Society cautions that it is important to maintain a sense of perspective about the minority of youth who report carrying weapons at school. The survey results cannot provide sufficient insight about the motivation for those youth who do have weapons. (p. 18)

Clearly, with the devastating memories still in our minds of school shootings in Littleton, Colorado, and Taber, Alberta, there may be justification in concluding that just one fatal act is one too many (Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

If participation in cliques contributes at all to the development of risky behaviours among youth, then, it behooves us to understand how the phenomenon of clique development occurs. Kinney (1993) describes the process whereby, in the middle grades, a polarization of status, together with concomitant nomenclature, begins to emerge among youngsters. He refers to students

> . . . divided into two distinct crowds: the unpopular nerds or dweebs and the popular trendies. Members of the trendy crowd were also referred to as the preppies, jocks, or the in-crowd and consisted of roughly 20 percent of the middle school population. Male athletes, cheerleaders, and their best friends make up the vast majority of the trendy crowd and are the most popular among their peers in the school because of their visibility. . . . Adolescents who were not trendies ended up by default in a large mass of students who were labelled "unpopular." (p. 26)

Two characteristics, according to Kinney, prevail among nerds: superior academic performance, and low levels of social skills. What is clear is an emerging dichotomy between coolness and non-coolness among early adolescents. From my personal informal observation among young British Columbian adolescents over the last 30 years, this dichotomy is predictable, occurring around Grade 6 or 7; however the specific characteristics, including athletic or cheerleading prowess among trendies, or high academic performance among nerds, may vary from location to location.

Kinney (1993) suggests that along with nerd status comes a negative effect on personal identity and self-esteem:

> These ostracized and isolated teenagers incorporated their popular peers' perceptions of them into their own thoughts and feelings about themselves. This finding is consistent with writings by developmental

> psychologists, who have noted that early adolescents have difficulty distinguishing their own identities from others' views of them. (p. 27)

Fortunately, says Kinney, being a nerd at the early adolescent level need be neither permanent nor terminal. He notes that when youngsters progress from the relatively tight social environment of their middle level schools to the more varied conditions of high school, the rigid group boundaries between trendies and nerds disintegrate, and things even out. Those previously labelled as nerds may forge new friendships among peers with similar interests, and develop their own cliques which, as Danesi (1994), has outlined, portray widely divergent standards of coolness. Indeed, suggests Kinney, some of the more "outrageous" cliques, which tend to form in reaction to previous negative status, actually compete successfully with the trendies from middle school for schoolwide popularity.

Merton (1996) posits, however, that once nerd status has been established, the process of divesting oneself of the label is more daunting than Kinney (1993) suggests, and that not all youngsters can regain a "normal" identity, succeed in joining a clique, or are able to think of themselves as cool. Schroeder-Davis (1992) outlines the strategies that high-achieving youngsters may employ in order to avoid nerd status, including denial, distraction (displaying excellence in other areas, such as athletics), deviance (for example seeking status as the "class clown"), or intentional underachievement (p. 7).

In an interesting case study, Bucholtz (1997) identified a group of high school girls who had formed an "anti-club", based not on similarities of interests, but on randomness and disparities of interests. Bucholtz argues that by not striving to identify with any of the school's existing cliques, members of the group in question qualify as nerds, and that being a nerd does not necessarily equate to non-identity or deficient identity: "And where other scholars seem to equate nerdiness with social death, I propose that nerds in U. S. high schools are not socially isolated misfits but competent members of a distinctive and oppositionally defined community of practice" (p. 2). We might conclude, though, that the individuality inherent in the anti-club members' community of practice as described by Bucholtz in fact really does characterize the broad definition of a clique as posited by Danesi (1994). What this case study does, however, is to remind us of the need to take care in adopting the vernacular of teenagerhood; the language is relative, not absolute. More to the point, perhaps, is to note that articles about nerds are indeed appearing in scholarly journals. Clearly, the language of teenagerhood, and the constructs they represent, are valid, and worth studying; "cool" and "nerd" are academically legitimate terms.

Putting Coolness and Teenagerhood into Perspective

Danesi (1994) claims that "The best access route to how the contemporary teenager thinks is through the symbology of *coolness*" (p. 35). If this offers a viable stance from which practitioners may seek solutions to the problems of at-risk adolescent behaviour, it is important to consider the limitations of his ideas. Indeed, Danesi himself warns against overgeneralizing with respect to applying his theory:

> Not every adolescent aspires to become cool. . . . The experience of adolescence cannot help but be highly diversified today in North America, given the high degree of variability in the onset of puberty, the large number of ethnically diverse teens in urban societies, and the socioeconomic heterogeneity of teens living in large cities. Nonetheless, I believe it is accurate to say that most of the adolescents living in our culture are aware of the characteristics of the portrait I have sketched, and that at various points in their adolescent development, they have manifested some of its features. (pp. 126-127)

His disclaimer is wide-spread, covering both innate, or physical, characteristics, and environmental, or cultural characteristics.

The latter aspect seems more salient, given his definition of teenagerhood, cited above, as a "discrete culture comprising psycho-social parameters". Which of two cultures tends to predominate among young adolescents--*culture* as defined more traditionally by geography, race, or ethnicity, or the *culture* of teenagerhood and coolness as propounded by Danesi (1994). What about the adolescent who is an honour student, captain of the track team, classical music fan, refuses drugs and tobacco, a virgin at 17, politely helps elderly academics across the street, and whose self-esteem tops all scales. Surely the definition of nerd doesn't fit. Does this portray a purposeful rejection of coolness in favour of more traditional values, or is our working symbology of coolness, as defined by Danesi, too narrow?

The answers to questions such as these appear bound to our perceptions concerning Danesi's (1994) definition of teenagerhood as a discrete culture. When individual adolescent cliques hold values, or demonstrate behaviours, diametrically opposed to those of other cliques, it is difficult to cling to the notion that a single culture is being described. But, insofar as Danesi has described in detail the wide variety existing among cliques it is obvious that he is not proposing such a narrow definition of coolness. Danesi's vision of culture must be viewed in terms of broad process, rather than of narrow content.

What remains is the problem of how to quantify the portion of teen population which is motivated by a need to be cool. Where Kinney (1993) suggests that initially, in middle level schools, the trendies comprise only about 20 percent of the school population, he makes it clear that many of the remaining 80 percent--the nerds--succeed in attaining coolness as they progress to the more variable social milieu comprising high school culture. But as to numbers, like Danesi (1994), he doesn't say.

Perhaps further research will clarify such questions. More to the point, perhaps, given the goals of this study, these questions really don't matter.

Weinrach and Thomas (1996) suggest it is important for counsellors to enhance their service through providing diversity-sensitive, or multi-cultural, counselling, including consideration of disability, ethnicity, physique, race, sexual orientation *age and culture* [italics added] (p. 1); this point will be considered further in the next chapter. As to the value of Danesi's (1994) theories to professional practice in our schools, what emerges is essence rather than substance. To the extent that at least some transescents or adolescents are drawn into, and motivated by, the cultural processes of teenagerhood and coolness as defined by Danesi, the potential avenue of support suggested in the adoption of Danesi's viewpoint may be well worth considering, given the gravity of the risks our youngsters face.

# CHAPTER 5

## Schools and School Personnel in Support of Cool Wannabes

> One major challenge facing educators in the middle grades is how to provide early adolescents with the social and emotional support they need to succeed as students. As young adolescents strive for autonomy, as they grapple with learning how to regulate their own behavior and make responsible choices, their need for close, caring adult supervision and guidance is paramount.
>
> (Mac Iver, 1990)

McWhirter et al. (1993) affirm the importance of our schools' efforts in addressing the challenges of at-risk youngsters, stating that schools ". . . must provide an environment that maximizes learning and minimizes conditions that interfere with learning. The healthiness of a school may be gauged by how well it accomplishes these objectives" (p. 3). In the context of education, the term *at-risk* initially may seem to mean *at risk of failing at school,* (in the sense of failing grades or dropping out). It's clear, however, that to the extent youngsters' motivation to be cool may lead them to make at-risk behavioural choices, (for example, substance abuse) which indirectly may interfere with learning, then schools must embrace a much broader view (McWhirter et al., p. 64).

The previous chapter suggested that Danesi's (1994) ideas about the culture of teenagerhood may offer professional practitioners some theoretical focus on which to formulate practical strategies to support young adolescents.

This notion must be viewed within limitations inherent in how his theories may be translated into practice. The processes in moving from motivation based on the conception of coolness to the adoption of risky behaviours are complex and varied. Where one youngster may choose a hazardous behaviour out of a desire to enhance coolness, another may behave in a dangerous way as a reaction to feeling, or being labelled, uncool.

Because Danesi's "culture of teenagerhood" comprises an essential process, rather than substantial content, what emerges is less a clear and specific blueprint, and more a hazy and general sketch. Danesi's ideas do not appear to support advocacy for specific or radical program initiatives beyond those which exist in current practice. His potential contribution is much more subtle, although perhaps no less valuable. What his notions do manage to achieve, is to lend credence to certain approaches or practices which may or may not be currently in effect. This chapter will attempt to draw attention to those practices.

Clarifying the Need for Schools to Address Coolness and its Risks

As to the appropriateness of the school system spearheading programs relating to at-risk adolescent behaviour, Tillotson (1993) suggests that schools play a key role for students who lack supportive home environments: "It is abundantly clear--the less stable and the less nurturing the home environment, the greater the reliance and the greater the demands the student, consciously or unconsciously, will place on the school for growth and development" (p. 6). Hamburg (1993) agrees, pointing to the deterioration in recent years of family structure and the concomitant erosion of support and guidance adolescents have tended to receive from their families:

> These support and guidance functions are essential to healthy adolescent development. They have historically come mainly from the family, but they can come from other sources as well--from responsible, caring adults in schools, in community and youth organizations, in religious organizations, and many more. (p. 468)

Hamburg suggests a need for partnerships among schools and other relevant organizations, integrating education with health and other programs relating to adolescent development (p. 470). Ultimately though, as Goleman (1995) suggests, school is the key venue for such programs:

> That is not to say that schools alone can stand in for all the social institutions that too often are in or nearing collapse. But since virtually every child goes to school (at least at the outset), it offers a place to reach children with basic lessons for living that they may never get otherwise. (p. 279)

He proposes ". . . an expanded mandate for schools, taking up the slack for failing families in socializing children" (p. 279). Goleman concurs with Hamburg, who states: "True, we are asking schools to do more than they have ever done, and we must. . . . But there is no practical alternative" (p. 470).

Brendtro et al. (1998) agree with Goleman (1995) and Hamburg (1993), suggesting:

> It has always been the "tribe" rather than the nuclear family that ultimately ensures cultural survival. . . . It is of the highest imperative that the modern family be strengthened and stabilized. But, in any culture, there will always be a large number of children born to adults whose parenting skills and resources are not sufficient to meet their needs. . . . In every city and hamlet, schools could become the new "tribes" to support and nurture children and adolescents at risk. (p. 12)

School, they insist, is the only institution in our society which can provide an enduring relationship with our youngsters, far exceeding that between most kids and their parents. Clearly, if schools do not succeed in attaining the role of "tribe" for young teens, then cool cliques likely will. Danesi (1994) points out that "It is precisely the high school environment that provides the primary locus within which teens anchor their social lives" (p. 126). School is where teen culture--coolness--grows and flourishes, therefore the most likely place to encounter the accompanying risks. If schools choose to ignore the opportunity to provide leadership, it will easily devolve to the cool peer group.

To the credit of our school system, a cursory examination of the literature pertaining to the problems of at-risk adolescents, and proposed solutions thereto, shows that our educators have not been idle. To the contrary, initiatives abound. There are programs addressing substance abuse, dropping out, teen pregnancy, sexually-transmitted diseases, gangs and violence; the list is lengthy. Some have been successful and some have not. To list, classify, and evaluate such programs would be an enormous task, well beyond the scope and objectives of this study. Goleman (1995) summarizes:

> Educational programs to prevent one or another specific problem such as drug use and violence have proliferated wildly in the last decade or so, creating a mini-industry within the educaton marketplace. But many of them--including many of the most slickly marketed and most widely used--have proven to be ineffective. A few, to the chagrin of educators, even seemed to increase the likelihood of the problems they were meant to head off, particularly drug abuse and teen sex. (p. 257)

Kazdin (1993) agrees, citing many programs that have had a positive impact on reducing at-risk adolescent behaviour, and, as well, a few which have backfired. And while not all programs provided by our society are school initiatives, very many are.

How, then, can schools be most effective in purveying programs which address the developmental needs and risks--the demands of coolness--of early adolescents, particularly from a preventive stance?

Structuring our Schools for Effectiveness

The overall organization and structure of our school system and its programs is worth consideration. As Eccles, Lord, and Midgley (1991) suggest, "Individuals are not likely to do very well or be very motivated if they are in social environments that do not fit their psychological needs" (p. 523). What about Danesi's (1994) "losers"? What about the dorks, the geeks, and the nerds? Goleman (1995) points out that we often lose them:

> Dropping out of school is a particular risk for children who are social rejects. The dropout rate for children who are rejected by their peers is between two and eight times greater than for children who have friends. . . . Small wonder: imagine spending thirty hours a week in a place where no one likes you. (p. 250)

For society at large, suggests Rumberger (1995), it is a serious and expensive problem, and of significant concern in middle level schools as well as in secondary schools. Concerning the extent to which we have come to grips with the problem, Brendtro et al. (1998) are blunt, suggesting "Educators have not yet risen to such challenges, and too often the school itself is a potent breeding ground for further alienation" (p. 13).

Some school districts have altered their school configurations in recognition of the developmental characteristics of their students by forming middle schools ostensibly to serve the needs of transescent youngsters. But while middle schools purport to provide programs and structure with the specific needs of transescents in mind, McEwin and Thomason (1989) suggest there is a substantial gap between what we know about transescents, and the extent to which we actually put that knowledge to use in structuring our schools:

> Although significant progress is being made in many middle level schools, the traditional secondary model remains dominant in far too many middle level schools. This traditional pattern simply does not reflect the kind of developmentally responsive schooling needed so desperately by early adolescents. (p. 2)

Eccles et al. (1991) concur, pointing out that although middle school philosophy addresses many of the needs identified for early adolescents, much is lost in the translation to practice: "More often than not, middle schools look like, and operate very similarly to, traditional junior high schools" (p. 527).

Designing Programs for Effectiveness

With respect to the characteristics of programs or interventions which work with at-risk, would-be-cool youngsters, Jones (1990) points out the value in attempting to ". . . address root causes by taking a broad-based approach" (p. 2). She contends that when developing programs for youth, we should consider the whole person, rather than someone manifesting a particular problem or pathology which needs to be "fixed". To reiterate a point made earlier by Kraizer (1990) and Allen et al. (1990), the focus must be less on the problem itself, and more on the process through which the problem tends to occur.

Davidow (1994) stresses the need for a systemic framework: "Every behavior has multiple determinants, and change of any kind entails complexities that almost defy description" (p. 306). Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-

Flanagan (1997) agree, suggesting that youngsters' social, intellectual, and emotional development is both complex and interactive, and influenced by a variety of relationships affecting children and their families (p. 156). This point is particularly significant with respect to counselling, and will be further developed below.

Additionally, Jones (1990) warns against the tendency for schools to develop programs in a flash-in-the-pan sort of way, rather than in a more orderly and scientific fashion:

> These programs generally operate under highly individualized circumstances. They typically are run by charismatic leaders and committed staff with limitless vision, tenacity, sacrifice and love. Because of their size and often unique nature, these programs have neither the experience nor, in many cases, the inclination to establish themselves in a more business-like and institutional manner, assuring evaluation and replication. (p. 2)

Are there, then, programs for our cool wannabe transescents which stand the test of Jones' stern scrutiny?

Rottier and Ogan (1991) point out that Middle Level educational programs tend to promote the development of the affective needs as well as the intellectual needs of early adolescents. Where Natale (1995) bemoans the current trend toward anti-academic attitudes among teens, identifying ". . . a growing anti-intellectualism in this country that ranks Beavis and Butthead over Balzac and

Botticelli" (p. 20), Goleman (1995), in his popular book, *Emotional Intelligence*, responds by speaking in favour of programs which promote the development of emotional and social skills in addition to the academic skills traditionally fostered in our schools. As he says:

> The brightest among us can founder on the shoals of unbridled passions and unruly impulses; people with high IQs can be stunningly poor pilots of their private lives. One of psychology's open secrets is the relative inability of grades, IQ, or SAT scores, despite their popular mystique, to predict unerringly who will succeed in life. . . . Academic intelligence offers virtually no preparation for the turmoil--or opportunity--life's vicissitudes bring. Yet even though a high IQ is no guarantee of prosperity, prestige, or happiness in life, our schools and our culture fixate on academic abilities, ignoring *emotional* intelligence, a set of traits--some might call it character--that also matters immensely for our personal destiny. (pp. 134-36)

His words echo those from a rueful Stevenson, (1990) who, in the foreword to Spencer's (1990) article, put it succinctly: "After all, we were prepared to teach subject matter--not the processes of growing successfully into healthy adolescence in the midst of the unprecedented circumstances of contemporary times" (p. i).

Perhaps the problem is that old habits die hard, and that to many people, teachers among them, change is anathema. Concerning the specific problem of violence in our schools, Remboldt (1998) believes that many teachers tend to resent any suggestion that they should forego their role as academic instructors in order to deal with troublesome behaviours among students. The result, she suggests, is that teachers unwittingly end up enabling the disruptive classroom behaviours about which they complain:

> They often develop psychological defenses against the need to do something about it. Maybe you have noticed these defenses:
>
> - Denial: "We don't have a problem with violence, but that other school does."
> - Minimization: "Name-calling and pushing and shoving are just normal behavior for kids."
> - Rationalization: "Kids have to learn to fight, to stand up for themselves."
> - Justification: "If we had a lower student-teacher ratio, we could do something about the violence."
> - Blame: "The parents aren't taking responsibility for their children's behavior."
> - Avoidance: "Violence in the school is for the administration and the police to deal with; I'm a teacher." (p. 33)

Perhaps it might be reasonable to extrapolate Remboldt's list of psychological defenses vis-à-vis all the at-risk behaviours which disrupt our schools and frustrate our academic instructors.

Mac Iver (1990) speaks of an emerging consensus with respect to the broad efficacy of a number of initiatives which do align with Goleman's (1995) stance.

Among many effective programs described in the literature, one example worth mentioning is the group advisory program which appears to be a key cornerstone in many middle level programs (Spencer, 1990). According to Mac Iver, the more-traditional departmentalized junior high programs which are structured to provide students with high quality instruction from a variety of subject-matter experts tend to preclude the close caring relationship strongly needed by transescent students who ". . . may feel that no teacher or other adult in the school really knows them, cares about them, or is available to help them with problems" (p. 458). This, says Mac Iver, results in a diminishment in youngsters' engagement in learning, causing them to look beyond school to meet their personal needs. And, as Danesi (1994) reminds us, youngsters looking beyond their school tend to look instead toward their peer-groups.

An effective advisory program, in which small groups of students are assigned to meet regularly with a teacher, administrator, or other school staff member to discuss topics important to students, is effective in fostering a close and trusting relationship between student and adult. Discussion topics may include social relationships, career information, personal or family problems, peer concerns, health issues, moral or ethical issues, and multi-cultural or intergroup relationships (Mac Iver, 1990, p. 459). More to the point, they permit the inclusion of topics which directly relate to issues of coolness, and thus promote the notion that, in fact, adults can care about youngsters' issues. Spencer (1990) refers to the

> . . . "whole child" who needs to know and be known by an adult. . . . When adults in a building do not know children individually, children are left to create their own zeitgeist within the school. They create social cliques. . . . They make their own judgments about the importance of academics in relation to the underground, largely adult-absent world they see as their primary identity group in school. (p. 3)

Danesi's (1994) vision of coolness snaps back into focus. The opportunity remains for schools to be part of that vision.

Tanaka, Warren, and Tritsch (1993), and Killin and Williams (1995) refer to the importance of student input with respect to developing the "curriculum" of the advisory program. While fans of the "Father Knows Best" philosophy may roll their eyes, it is a notion which seems to be catching on, notwithstanding. Recently, in British Columbia, the Ministry of Attorney General's Children's Commission published *The Youth Report* (Sylvester, Sam, Harry, & Tom, 1999), in which the four authors, aged 15 - 17, report their findings consequent to consulting dozens of youth throughout the province on issues currently affecting British Columbia's youngsters:

> The report talks about the problems youth face and the solutions. The youth we talked to had really innovative and practical ideas that wouldn't cost much money to make things better for themselves and future generations. So we hope youth will read this report

because:

- This report can also help you figure out where to go for help if you need it.

- This report has some ideas for making things better for you and other youth.

We also hope that people who work with youth read this report because:

- It has some ideas about how youth think you can help them. (p. 2)

Among the themes emerging from the report are (a) a need for increased respect between youth and adults, (b) increased services to provide help with drug and alcohol issues, (c) improved services in the area of suicide prevention, (d) a need to reduce racism and promote equality, (e) a need for increased recreational opportunities, (f) increased awareness of rights, particularly for youth in care, or receiving services from the Ministry for Children and Families, and (g) the need for improved services to assist youth in custody to get their lives back on track. In short, the report, which is not specific to schools, confirms that youth certainly recognize the problems ascribed to them by adults. More important to note, the report makes the point that the energies and abilities of our teens can be, and should be, utilized as major resources in the campaign to seek solutions to the problems facing our teens.

Gazing over the somnolent stance characterizing many middle level students in the classroom, the teacher may tend to disbelieve the existence of "energies and abilities" among transescent youngsters. Brendtro et al. (1998) place the blame on the nature of most classroom programs and practices extant, contending that student boredom is, in fact, a significant issue. They contend that when schools disregard "the adventurous spirit of youth", rebellion is a natural consequence. They point to the success of programs such as Outward Bound, which emerged in the years following the First World War. Programs such at these focus on challenge and adventure, trust and team-building, fitness and skills, and independence and empowerment--cool activities. The real world of the outdoors replaces the artificial world of the classroom wherein the activities may appear to students as meaningless and irrelevant, and not at all cool.

Schusser (1998) describes an adventure-based outdoor leadership project designed for at-risk youth in New Zealand. He speaks of the magic which ". . . is that special something that happens in a natural environment, in the bush, the water, the sky, the snow" (p. 14). Richards (1999) narrates her personal experiences in progressing through identity crises, overcoming anorexia nervosa, and developing a career in research, as a result of her involvement in the outdoor education field. Davidson (1998) summarizes the values of outdoor-based programs:

> An altered state of consciousness is the essence of outdoor experiences, a Sacred Space in which transformation and change are possible. Creating such a space in the outdoors separate from "mundane" reality and full of novelty and excitement helps to explain why the most inspired memories of the students were from a camp or trip. . . . In the outdoors "where it really matters" the context of learning fits in to a broader context with which the student is familiar. The outcomes of actions are imminent and real. (pp. 23-24)

But as Brendtro et al. (1998) point out, "Today, in many classrooms the major physical activity is circling answers on a worksheet and the greatest adventure comes from challenging authority" (p. 17). Implied is the suggestion that in the typical middle level classroom of today's schools, the needs being addressed may not be those of the students.

The Effective Teacher and School Team

It's people that make programs happen. In our schools, the classroom teacher plays the prime role through direct contact with our youngsters. McEwin and Thomasin (1989) suggest that two strengths characterise effectiveness among middle grade teachers: "First, they have a thorough knowledge of the developmental nature of early adolescents. Second, they have subject matter and instructional expertise" (p. 10). While the latter point may seen axiomatic, and applicable to all grade levels, the former point is worth expanding. Cool transescent behaviours may be challenging, to say the least, and may tend to daunt those teachers not willing to understand and accommodate the unique and pervasive stresses that operate on, and emanate from, youngsters in this phase of development. As McEwin and Thomasin say, "The plaintive cry that seventh graders should act their age can most often be countered with the idea that they probably are" (p. 9). The effective middle grade teacher, they suggest, should embody certain characteristics; Their list is worth citing at length:

> During this time of increased stress and insecurity among students, youth look toward adults who are in control of themselves, their lives and their work environment. Teachers who are effective in these areas demonstrate their competence by willingly taking risks, being receptive to new ideas, and by accepting new challenges. They seem less concerned with power and ego and manage classrooms without being overtly controlling or rigid. They are genuinely sensitive to the feelings of others and flexible without appearing inconsistent and accepting without appearing unprincipled. They have the respect of students without being feared; and they have a pervasive sense of rightness about classroom procedures. Perhaps one of the most essential ingredients effective middle level teachers have is a healthy sense of humor. (p. 12)

Fitzsimmons (1998) agrees, suggesting that teachers who are self-aware and self-confident are indeed "therapeutic". She points to the need for teachers to develop a "nurturing, caring environment" in their classes in order to establish trust and rapport (p. 1). Clearly, these characteristics are personal, as well as professional. Effective middle-level teaching, it would appear, is about innate talent as well as acquired technique; we should look to the art of teaching, as well as to the science of teaching.

Fortunately, for those teachers who don't feel up to assuming the super-teacher guise seemingly implied in McEwin and Thomasin's (1989) list, help is at hand. School professionals comprise more than classroom teachers. Tillotson (1993) points out that teachers gratefully rely on instructional support teams for assistance. McGee and Fauble-Erickson (1995) outline the roles of school administrators and counsellors in support of the middle level teacher, and Davidow (1994) writes in support of the role of the school psychologist.

School staffs, or school district itinerant personnel, may comprise a wide variety of roles other than those mentioned: learning assistance teachers, speech-language pathologists, behaviour or rehabilitation specialists, aides or teaching assistants, and others. Remboldt (1998) points to the need not to overlook non-teaching school staff, such as coaches, cooks and bus drivers, when planning support for youngsters. While McEwin and Thomasin may imply that any professional working with early adolescents would do well to possess the characteristics on their list, what clearly emerges is the need for a team approach in providing the most efficacious support for our transescent students.

The Educational Counsellor--a Key Team Member

In keeping with the expressed intent of this study, the role of the educational counsellor requires further comment. Historically, it's been the job of the counsellor to understand the pressures and concerns of adolescence, and to provide skilled help (Harvey and Schaufele, 1983). Rose-Gold (1991) as well as McGee and Fauble-Erickson (1995) have delineated the tasks which comprise the role of the middle-grades counsellor. These include identification of concerns, and subsequent direct work with students, in individual and group settings, and in a assortment of programs, both preventive and interventive. Beyond working directly with students, they point out that the role of the counsellor also comprises working with families, networking with other school personnel, and consulting with personnel from related outside agencies. Foci may include academic concerns, personal or family issues, social problems, emotional problems, and sometimes advocacy. And in times of crisis, does not the counsellor top the list of Whom To Call? Foster-Harrison (1995), who apparently has "been there, done that", captures the essence of the counsellor's daily round:

> Examine this scenario: processing large amounts of paperwork, taking calls from parents, assisting crying children, processing folders, attending to teacher's drop-in visits, meeting with crisis team, meeting with teams for exceptional children, updating administrative tasks, meeting with central office, and holding activities with groups. (p. 95)

Clearly, school counselling includes widely varied roles, which, especially in smaller schools, defy specialization and demand a "smorgasbord" approach (Rose-Gold, p. 123). But more, as Foster-Harrison suggests, counselling requires approaches which make the most effective use of time.

Complementary to the widely varied roles involved in counselling at the middle level is the need for a widely varied collection of skills, knowledge and goals relating directly to early adolescents. Gerler (1991) urges counsellors to plan programs that make middle schools inviting places for young people to learn and grow, and suggests the goal for middle school counsellors should be to provide a blend of challenge and support that will promote identity development in early adolescence (p. 1). Clearly, that involves the need to strive for coolness.

Johnson and Kottman (1992) underscore McEwin and Thomasin's (1989) point by insisting: "In light of the transitional nature of the middle school years, it is crucial that the middle school counselor build a program based on developmental changes" (p. 3). Indeed they take the point further, suggesting that each age level within the broad definition of early adolescence comprises fairly specific behavioural and attitudinal components, and using this information as a guideline, counsellors can create guidance programs relevant to the cognitive, physical, and emotional needs of students.

Kottman (1990) reminds us that for transescent students, motivation is a key goal: "It is necessary for the school counselor to captivate their interest and imagination" (p. 138). He points out that, although motivation is important for youngsters at all levels, there are some developmental characteristics of early adolescents which make this point crucial for transescents specifically. Youngsters of this level may be more reluctant to reveal their emotions. They may have a lower level of impulse control, or may have a higher level of anxiety. They may experience mood fluctuations characteristic of puberty. They may fear, or lack comfort in, approaching an adult in order to express their problems (O'Connell & Fondo, 1997). Or, as Danesi (1994) suggests, they may be affected by a strong need to be cool.

Further, to make matters more challenging, students at this level may very well be involuntary clients, referred to counselling by frustrated teachers, administrators, or parents, and therefore resistant to engage in a counselling relationship. Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (1997) state that this may occur

> . . . when children or teenagers are brought to therapy because of behavior patterns that bother or irritate adults. Counseling becomes problematic when adults are more motivated to change a young client's behavior than is the client. Specifically, the problem involves how to work most effectively with young clients who do *not* think they have problems and do *not* want to engage in counseling. (p. v)

They suggest that many youngsters brought in to counselling hold anti-establishment attitudes, and may tend to exhibit anger and rebelliousness which are, in fact, developmentally appropriate (p. 7). Clearly they are attributes related to coolness. Indeed, Ritchie (1994) suggests that in an involuntary counselling relationship, ". . . to not resist would be unhealthy" (p. 59). Although Ritchie writes about counselling children, aged 4-12, it must be noted that the upper end of his age-range is well into the transescent phase.

Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (1997) concur with Ritchie (1994) and Kottman (1990) in urging counsellors to overcome resistance by utilizing methods that are active and interactive, rather than a more traditional "talk" style of therapy, which may seem to the transescent either to be too passive, or too threatening. Kottman lists and describes three alternatives: therapeutic game play, use of stories and metaphors, and role-play and simulation. Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan urge a stance wherein the therapist sides with the adolescent and thereby validates the youngster's feelings, increasing comfort and trust. And to reduce anxiety and stress among clients, Daigneault (1999) points to the well-documented value of humour and laughter in the therapeutic process: "Question: 'What is the difference between the [counsellor] and the patient?' Answer: 'Sometimes the patient gets better.'" (p. 13). Or something like that.

Related to the problem of resistance is the tendency for early adolescents not to seek help from counsellors because of their lack of exposure to counselling services, and knowledge of what that might entail. They may perceive the counsellor's role as one merely of helping with timetables and career concerns, or perhaps as one of helping only when something is "really serious" (Harvey and Schaufele, 1983, p. 13). They may not perceive the counsellor's potential to be what Mac Iver (1990) describes as the adult who ". . . really knows them, cares about them, or is available to help them with their problems" (p. 458). Or perhaps they might not perceive the counsellor as someone who can relate to their need to be cool. Moreover, as Harvey and Schaufele point out, counselling services at the elementary level, (the upper end of which includes transescent students), are limited at best. It will be interesting to see whether, in this era of budgetary constraints, counselling positions in our schools are reduced, maintained, or increased.

On an encouraging note in the province of British Columbia recently, the Ministry of Education and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (1998) entered into an "Agreement in Committee" which, among other issues addressed, sets staffing ratios in place for a variety of non-enrolling professionals, including counsellors. The net result should be a total increase of 79 counsellors added throughout the province, to meet a minimum ratio of 1:693.

While this initiative should result in improvement in counselling services for many British Columbia students it may be argued that the situation is far from ideal. Undoubtedly it's still not reasonable to expect the educational counsellor's direct personal touch in every phase of guiding our transescent youngsters. As Gerler (1991) says:

> Middle school counselors cannot do everything. They are faced with issues such as dysfunctional families, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, teen suicide, sexual abuse, school dropouts, and numerous other difficult matters. Counselors, therefore, must set priorities and develop programs to meet those priorities. Preventive and developmental programs seem to be the most promising and cost-effective approaches to counseling with young adolescents in middle schools. (p. 2)

Harvey and Schaufele (1983) and Wintre and McVey (1991) found that younger adolescents tend to seek help less from professional consultants such as counsellors, and more from familiar adults such as parents. "Mom", particularly, rated highly on the list. As adolescents grow older, preference for peer consultants creeps in, but does not replace that for familiar adults. But are peers competent consultants, particularly with respect to the gravity and complexity of many of the issues facing our young teens? Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (1997) state,

> Young clients who are experiencing distress generally distrust therapists and eschew advice from parents, teachers, and therapists. . . . More often than not, when faced with personal problems, such adolescents seek out the advice of peers. Unfortunately, advice from fellow teenagers is frequently of poor quality. The problem is how to get oppositional and impulsive adolescents to seek out and follow advice from a reasonable adult. (p. 47)

It is interesting to note that, in terms of effectiveness or competence, Sommers-

Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan appear to lump parents in with trained teachers and therapists. The assumption seems to be that adults, and parents in particular, are competent by definition, whereas young people--peers--are not. It is rather a simplistic conclusion.

Regardless, it would appear that counsellors need not fear unemployment. The importance of their role as facilitator of parenting programs, or as co-ordinator of peer-helper programs, is clear (see, for example, Steele, 1985, and Dorsch 1995). This notion will be further developed in the pages to follow.

Assuming, then, that our reluctant youth is willing to turn away from peer support in order to seek out a counsellor for assistance, and assuming that our counsellor is adequately prepared in terms of skills and knowledge, what professional stance works best to foster an effective counselling process?

Essentially, counsellors need to be aware that the nature and quality of the relationship between the referred youth and the professional is the key element, and that its continual development, evaluation and revision is the central goal (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 1997). This fits with the point made earlier in this chapter that there is a need to develop close and trusting relationships among school personnel and students.

Additionally, also as mentioned earlier in this chapter, counsellors need to remain aware that youngsters' social, intellectual and emotional development is a complex and interactive process involving a variety of familial and societal relationships. Hackney and Cormier (1996) point out the need for counsellors to adopt a systemic approach toward dealing with children's issues inasmuch as youngsters are relatively powerless in affecting their adult-controlled environments (p. 40). Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (1997) concur, stating

> Counseling *can* empower young clients. Through individual counseling, young clients can learn to influence their family, school, and social systems by responding to various situations in increasingly adaptive and constructive ways. However, sometimes, no matter how much a young client strives toward adaptive emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses, significant change does not occur because powerful family or external forces maintain and perpetuate dysfunction. . . . In fact, many family therapists strongly advocate working, if at all possible, primarily or exclusively with families when addressing child/adolescent problems. (pp. 154-156)

They go on to urge mental health professionals working with youth to seek out specific training in working with family systems.

Beyond the need for counsellors to work with their youthful clients in the contexts of their family systems, practitioners need also to consider broader societal systems which influence, and are influenced by, the attutudes and behaviours of their transescent clientele. Chapter 1 of this study acknowledged Danesi's (1994) suggestion that teenagerhood comprises a discrete culture in and of itself. Stipulating the validity of this stance further suggests that counsellors would do well to adopt a multicultural approach in order to deal effectively with young adolescents. A cursory glance at this aspect of counselling practice vis-à-vis the culture of adolescence is in order.

Recognition of multicultural dimensions in counselling is not new (Patterson, 1996) and is commonly touched on in the content of counselling textbooks (for example, Corey, 1991; Egan, 1994; and Hackney & Cormier, 1996). Concerning the current state of counsellor education, Das (1995) states, "The quality and depth of training provided in the majority of programs are, however, not deemed sufficient to meet the growing mental health needs of a culturally diverse population" (p. 46). Das further proposes that counsellor training programs, comprising curriculum, clinical training and supervision, research and theory development, and institutional policies and practice, require major reorientation to focus more closely on multicultural issues (pp. 49-50). Arthur (1998) agrees, suggesting, ". . . it is unreasonable to expect that standards for professional competence can be attained without systematic integration of multicultural content into core areas of counsellor education" (p. 98).

The term "multicultural counselling" requires clarification. According to Patterson (1996), where the term initially referred to practice with respect to racial and ethnic issues, the nomenclature subsequently expanded to consider a broader range of subcultures, including gender groups, socioeconomic groups and age groups (p. 227). Arthur (1998) suggests alternative criteria: "A more inclusive definition of multicultural counselling recognizes issues of unequal treatment and discrimination felt by diverse populations, not limited to racial and ethnic differences" (p. 89). Thus, our stance that teenagerhood may constitute a discrete culture with respect to counselling very well may be appropriate. How closely, then, does the notion of multicultural-counselling align with the psychotherapeutical needs of transescence?

Quite closely, suggest Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (1997):

> The challenges of counseling young clients originate in the cultural differences between adults and young people. In many very important ways, work with young people is *multicultural* work. . . . Most adults do not play Pogs, collect "X-men" cards, engage in burping contests, burn the drag, get chased on the playground by leering boys, or get harassed at the bus stop by neighborhood bullies. As they balance their checkbooks, pay their mortgages, sip their coffee, answer their voice mail, and attend marriage enhancement seminars, there is no doubt that most social workers, counselors, and therapists have daily experiences very different from those of their young clients, clients who are busily bumming cigarettes, skipping classes, and reading comic books. (p. 4)

Or, as Danesi (1994) might put it, being cool.

With respect to current thinking in the field of multicultural counselling, the view propounded by Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (1997) fits with that of Merali (1999) who points out that culturally-different clients, whose socialization experiences have been distinct from those of society's dominant group, ". . . often espouse values that are incongruent with those advanced by counsellors representing the major theoretical orientations" (p. 28).

According to Merali (1999), the problem of counsellor-client value conflict is typically addressed in two ways. First, culturally-different clients may be referred to professionals of similar cultural background. Undoubtedly this suggests a need to recruit and develop professionals from the population of the culturally-diffent clients to be served, perhaps even to the extent of implementing affirmative action programs. Clearly this strategy is problematic with respect to the needs of transescents--how many young teenagers are able to attain the status of professional counsellor? Arthur (1998) proposes the need for counsellor-training curricula to emphasize nontraditional forms of helping. Perhaps one promising option, as noted earlier in this chapter, might be more actively to promote the development of peer-helper programs in our middle level schools. This point will be examined further below.

The second strategy which Merali (1999) suggests can be used to deal with counsellor-client value conflict is a four-step process typically proposed in current multicultural counselling theory. She outlines the steps a counsellor accordingly should follow: (a) Acquire knowledge about the specific cultural group to which the client belongs; (b) Acquire skills to interact with the client in a culturally-sensitive manner, in order to collect information about the presenting problem; (c) Examine the influence of the counsellor's own cultural upbringing upon the values related to the presenting problem; and (d) Suspend the counsellor's own values, and enter the client's world (p. 31).

Ultimately, suggests Merali (1999), the process is not as simple as it appears, inasmuch as language cannot be rendered totally value-free. She suggests a reconceptualizing of counselling as a continual process of value negotiation, involving counsellor self-disclosure (p. 32). The theory is appealing, but with respect to the public school system, does the mandate of school counsellors allow them to suspend totally the values inherent in their roles? It is an interesting ethical dilemma.

Patterson's (1996) stance differs somewhat from that of Merali (1999). Patterson questions the assumption that different cultural and subcultural groups require different approaches. Moreover, according to Patterson, every client belongs to numerous cultural groups, and therefore attempting to develop theories, methods, or techniques for each identifiable group would be staggering and ineffective.

> The current overemphasis on cultural diversity and culture specific counseling leads to . . . a focus on specific techniques (or skills as they are now called), with the counselor becoming a chameleon who changes

> styles, techniques, and methods to meet the presumed characteristics of clients from varying cultures and groups. (p. 230)

Patterson advocates an approach which places less emphasis on techniques, and more on the counsellor-client relationship, striving toward such outcomes as mutual respect, genuineness, and empathic understanding. It is a stance which brings us back to those of Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (1997), Mac Iver (1990), and Spencer (1990).

It is worthwhile to examine the roles and skills needed by educational counsellors in light of the need for a preventive stance suggested above in Chapter 1. Conyne (1997) defines preventive counselling as ". . . the programmatic, before-the-fact application of comprehensive counseling methods with healthy or at-risk groups to enhance competencies and avert dysfunction" (p. 260). This contrasts with remedial interventions, which are brought on line after the fact, and designed to remediate dysfunctions which have already occurred.

Conyne (1997) identifies ten skills clusters essential to preventive counselling. They are worth examining at length:

1. Primary prevention perspective. Conyne (1997) posits that this is the fundamental set of skills required for preventive counselling, in that ". . . it serves as the lens through which all other considerations are viewed" (p. 262). He lists nine consitituent characteristics of this skills cluster: (a) a before-the-fact

orientation, seeking to intervene before the emergence of dysfunction; (b) the goal to reduce incidence of the problem, and to slow the development of new problems; (c) an ecological, systemic vantage point, rather than an individual or interpersonal one; (d) an approach targeting healthy people, and people at-risk, rather than those for whom dysfunction is already occurring; (e) a wide targeted population, focusing on groups rather than individuals; (f) a multifactorial set of interventions, including both direct (e. g., group work) and indirect (e. g., media) approaches; (g) a use of multidisciplinary expertise derived from a variety of sources, such as public health, psychology, epidemiology, and marketing; (h) a use of teams to comprise the planning, control, and delivery functions of the process, and including individuals from multidisciplinary backgrounds, as well as representation from the target population itself; (i) the goal to empower the target population, and to strengthen feelings of self-efficacy and personal control.

2. Personal attributes and behaviours. Conyne (1997) suggests that preventive counsellors require many of the personal attributes traditionally needed by remedial practitioners, including empathy, respect and patience. Additionally, he suggests, some characteristics are particularly pertinent, given the longer term, programmatic nature of preventive practice; these include persistence, flexibility, creativity, and organization.

3. Ethics skills. Conyne (1997) reminds us that preventive counselling

lacks "clients" in the traditional sense. "It is conceiveable, then, that interventions could be designed by professionals without the consent and participation of the people for whom they are intended--and then actually foisted on them" (p. 264). He suggests this might constitute invasion of privacy, but proposes that to counteract this ethical breach, user participation in goal-setting and program design be an integral part of the process.

4. Marketing skills. Conyne (1997) points to the problem often encountered when programs are offered, and no one comes to take part. He proposes forming partnerships with professionals in the fields of motivation, sales, public relations, advertising, communication technologies, and media, in order to ensure that programs reach their target populations.

5. Multicultural skills. Conyne (1997) suggests that because preventive programs often are designed for delivery to large groups in their community settings, competency in multicultural counselling is essential. "In preventive counseling, programmatic interventions must be created and delivered in such a way as to be not only effective but culturally appropriate" (p. 265). This point clearly reiterates comments made above.

6. Group facilitation skills. Inasmuch as preventive counselling primarily targets groups, Conyne (1997) affirms the need for practitioners to develop strong skills in the area of group facilitation. "Critically important to psychoeducation

groups is the ability of the facilitator to help balance content and process" (p. 265). Further, because of the importance of interdisciplinary teams to effective program planning, group skills for leaders and team members are particularly essential.

7. Collaboration skills. Again, Conyne (1997) reminds us of the multidisciplinary nature of preventive counselling. He advocates the "melding of expert resources from a variety of areas" (p. 265), wherein resources, expertise, and experience are shared, and ultimately synthesized into a coherent and functional whole.

8. Dynamics skills for organizations and settings. Conyne (1997) suggests that ". . . communities and neighborhoods are to preventive counseling what the individual is to remedial counseling" (p. 265). He stresses the ecological nature of preventive counselling, and the need to locate preventive programs in naturally occurring environmental contexts such as schools, churches, community councils, and worksites. Accordingly, the practitioner must be aware of, and comfortable with, principles and procedures relating to organization behaviour and protocols in a variety of settings.

9. Trends and political dynamics skills. According to Conyne (1997) it is important to remember that preventive program initiatives occur within a broader ecological system comprising social trends, public trends, and political

dynamics. The successful practitioner requires the ability to maneuver adeptly and comfortably within this milieu, recognizing both supportive and restraining forces.

10. Research and evaluation skills. Conyne (1997) affirms the need for preventative counsellors to come up with sound answers to the age-old question, "Does it work, and how can you show it?" (p. 266). The credibility and effectiveness of their initiatives in terms of appropriateness, efficiency, adequacy, and side effects are under scrutiny, requiring astute evaluative techniques. Conyne identifies four reasons why the evaluation of preventive programs is especially challenging:

> First, what works in preventive counseling often means that something bad did not happen; demonstrating the absence of something occurring demands unique approaches to research and evaluation. Second, whether problems are prevented in the future often suggests the use of longitudinal research designs. Third, preventive counseling programs are usually complex and comprehensive, yielding difficult management issues. Finally, preventive counseling is often conducted on-site, in the community, with participants collaborating in the design and implementation of the effort. The community-collaborative nature of preventive counseling calls for sensitive research designs. (p. 266)

Moreover, funding for preventive initiatives often comes from external sources, and may be dependent on the extent to which results are seen to be favourable to the sponsoring agency or corporation.

Provision for the development of skills as proposed by Conyne (1997) impacts on counsellor education programs, and he suggests that faculty incorporate his preventive skills clusters in course and program designs when training future counsellors.

It is important to view the ideas presented above vis-à-vis the mandate of counsellors employed in the public school system. The Province of British Columbia's (1989) *Inter-Ministerial Protocols for the Provision of Support Services to Schools* truncates the processes of mental health support, and restricts the school counsellor's responsibilities accordingly:

> The role of school counsellors does not involve treatment. Their role is confined to identification of students who require referral for mental health intervention, personal counselling to students on school-related matters, referral and the provision of school-related services as appropriate. (p. 25)

The document continues, placing the prime responsibility for psychiatric services, counselling, and family therapy in the hands of the Ministry of Health (p. 26). It suggests a scene reminiscent of M*A*S*H, with a front-line triage unit of school counsellors prepping their clients for further treatment at the hands of their Ministry of Health colleagues. Clearly, this definition does not align with many of the needs of youngsters, as cited above. To reiterate the point made by McWhirter et al. (1993), out-of-school issues certainly can affect in-school performance (p. 64); it is not easily possible for the counsellor to draw the line separating "school-related matters" from non-school-related matters. And the stance certainly doesn't fit with Jones' (1990) point that programs should consider the "whole person".

More recently, British Columbia's Ministry of Education, Special Education Branch (1995), revised its *Special Education: A Manual of Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines.* This document provides a broader-based definition of counselling services in schools, listing as its purpose "Non-categorical resource services designed to support students, their families and educators" (p. D-5). The manual lists six counselling functions, which comprise individual, group and class work, and provide for preventive and interventive foci. These functions include the following:

> The counsellor:
>
> - promotes personal and social development appropriate to developmental stages;
> - counsels students, their families and the community to foster growth in the students' self esteem, individual responsibility, and in skills such as decision-making and social skills;
> - ameliorates factors which may precipitate problems for students;
> - enhances students' educational achievement through goal setting, assisting with the development of SLPs, IEPs and activities such as promotion of effective work and study habits;

- provides appropriate interventions to assist students with school-related problems and issues; and

- facilitates the goals of career education by assisting students and their families to explore and clarify the student's career options, through developmental activities that stress decision-making, personal planning and career awareness. (pp. D5-D6)

Key points are the inclusion of "intervention", which clearly goes beyond simple identification of problems, "counselling students' families," which suggests the possibility of a systemic approach, and work with the "community" and "social skills", which may be seen to comprise the context in which coolness develops. Additionally, the focus on developmental stages is salient, as is the stance on goal-setting, and therefore prevention. To the extent this document represents some change in the mandate of school counsellors, one is left to wonder about the degree to which, in reality, school counsellors actually have changed their practice to fulfil these functions. Perhaps further research could clarify this point.

The promotion and implementation of peer-helper programs, among the tools of the middle-level counsellor as mentioned earlier in this study, requires further comment. According to Foster-Harrison (1995), such programs, which include peer tutoring, peer counselling, peer mediation, and peer mentoring, do not comprise a new notion, but rather have developed and flourished over the years. While a complete description of these programs is beyond the scope of this study, their value overall is worth noting.

> It has been a practice of many counselors in the past to use the services of a variety of students or paraprofessionals just to "survive." The uses varied, the roles were different, but the problems and demands continued to exist. Today, the school counselor is called on to develop programs that engage students in different ways and for different reasons than just to survive.
>
> The elementary and middle school halls abound with problems. The questions before the counselor are many: What can I do that makes a significant difference for the children and affects the school in a productive way? What can I do that has long-term, lasting effects rather than just "finger in the dyke" reactions? . . . How do I minimize my time, but maximize my results? (p. 94)

Peer helper programs, contends Foster-Harrison, meet these criteria. They enable more youngsters to receive help daily than can be provided directly by professional counsellors, and they establish processes of assistance that continue beyond school walls, and beyond school years.

To reiterate the point made by Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (1997), young adolescents do tend to turn to their peers for help and guidance, but the quality of peer help may be suspect. Therefore, suggests Henriksen (1991), "It makes sense to train young people in basic helping skills to utilize more effectively the influence which is already there" (p. 12). This certainly begins to address Merali's (1999) point, cited above, that culturally-different clients would benefit from helpers of similar cultural background.

The value of the peer helping process, according to Foster-Harrison (1995) lies in the mutuality of the positive results accrued. The helper benefits as much as does the peer being helped. In Foster-Harrison's words, "Students who provide the service are known to demonstrate increased skills and developmental growth. Students who receive skills are known to benefit from the interaction with their peers" (p. 95). Moreover, says Foster-Harrison, the processes of peer helping comprise dimensions which are not only reactive, but also proactive. As such, they meet most of Conyne's (1997) criteria for preventive counselling. One criterion, however, is problematic--how to evaluate the effectiveness of such a program. Much of the peer helping process tends to occur outside the time and place of school, and thus its efficacy, or lack thereof, might never redound to the efforts of the counsellor. This, no doubt, represents a barrier to the extent to which peer helping programs might be seen as effective, and therefore acceptable and worthy of promotion. Notwithstanding, peer-helping clearly comprises systemic and ecological processes, and thus represents a potentially effective tool in the counsellor's kit.

What remains is the general need for counsellors to continue to be open to innovative approaches, new theories, and novel ideas, and above all, to be sensitive and responsive to the unique imperatives of the developmentally appropriate culture of teenagerhood and coolness.

# CHAPTER 6

## Summary, Conclusions, Implications and Significance

> Children have been a challenge to their elders since the beginning of time, so perhaps there are few totally novel ideas about how to deal with them.
>
> Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1998.

> Norah had many times insisted that he get literature from the Department of Agriculture to see how they might improve their grass crops, but he usually forgot or failed to answer her. Once he had remarked, "Hell, I'm not running this place half as good as I know how to already."
>
> St. Pierre, 1966.

Seen through the windows of our metaphorical tour bus, the intricacy and complexity of the forest canopy overhead is dazzling. Leaves, needles, twigs and boughs are completely and randomly tangled. Under the ground, the root systems are similarly interwoven. To identify and examine any one twig or rootlet as a discrete entity would be impossible without disturbing or affecting the others. This is the reality of ecological research. Further, each researcher brings to the study his or her own unique interpretive outlook. We can never understand a tree except as an integral part of a complex dynamic system, which includes the biases of the observer.

Similarly, any study of young adolescents, their characteristics, their issues and their problems, can only begin to make sense when viewed systemically, within the complexities of their developmental, social, and cultural contexts, and subject to the perspectives of the researcher and of the reader.

## Summarizing the Process and Content of this Study

The journey began with an introduction to the essence of some grave concerns. All too frequently, to adults, teen conduct is offensive. Worse, the behaviours of our adolescent youths often are distressing because some of those actions render our youngsters at significant risk for unhealthy, dangerous, or negative consequences. Society's reactive attempts to forestall deleterious or disastrous outcomes resulting from adolescent behaviours tend to focus specifically on the problems themselves, and are not always effective. As an alternative, some researchers urge modification of our approaches. One increasingly popular notion is to focus less on the problems themselves, and more on the processes through which problems develop--the motivational factors and social imperatives which drive our teens' problem behaviours. A complementary approach, recognizing that problems increase during the transition from childhood to adolescence, is to adopt a more preventive stance through working proactively with youngsters before they attain adolescence.

This study proposes that Danesi's (1994) book, *Cool: The Signs and Meanings of Adolescence,* comprises a potentially viable theoretical approach around which to build proactive strategies to deal effectively with our at-risk teens. Central to Danesi's theory is the notion that teenagerhood comprises a unique culture, the essence of which is a strong motivation to be cool. The study posits that, by understanding the powerful and pervasive behavioural imperatives inherent in the need for coolness, we can work more respectfully, more sensitively, and more effectively, with our teens, to encourage them to make safe and positive choices with respect to their behaviours.

Placing Danesi's (1994) ideas in the context of literature pertaining to our school system, its structure, its programs, its professional staff roles, and in particular, those of its counsellors, the study attempts to lay the groundwork for improving practices in order to enhance the job we are currently doing in guiding our teens.

Concerning methodology, this study has required an approach which is appropriate to the need for a broad ecological stance, given the inherent complexity of the concerns. The method chosen is a combined integrative and interpretive review, as Cooper (1982, 1985, 1998) and Eisenhart (1998) have identifed and propounded. The study thus involves an examination of a wide variety of literature, both academic and popular, pertaining to young adolescents, their characteristics, their needs, their problems, and the effectiveness of approaches to dealing with them. Part of the ecological stance is to attempt to integrate the contributions of practitioners in the field with those of researchers in the academy. To the extent that interpretation and communication are central components of this study, and in keeping with the examples provided by some of the theorists cited, this paper resorts frequently to the use of metaphor, and occasionally to the use of colloquial language, hopefully to clarify meaning.

Identifying and Articulating Some Conclusions

The challenge at this point in the paper is to identify some coherent and meaningful themes among the disparate selections of literature comprising the bulk of the study. Clearly, a simple and linear grocery list of findings will be out of the question, given the study's ecological stance. Again, to return to our forest metaphor, earlier this study suggested that we regard the selected literature as the foliage of our trees. This requires further clarification.

It is clear that some sources are cited more often, and are thematically more central in terms of their connectedness to other writings. All selections contribute to the overall shape of our tree, but while some are merely leaves, some may be seen as boughs, or perhaps trunks, in their own right, providing significantly noticeable structural features. These comprise major thematic contributions emerging from the literature, and as such, they may suggest significant possibilities for further research, or implications for more effective practice. Emerging as predominant, methodologically, among the studies selected in this review are the works of Cooper (1982, 1985, 1998) and Eisenhart (1998). They showed how the integrative and interpretive review formats comprise a viable and appropriate stance from which to explore such complex topics as the ecosystem of transescent culture. Predominant, with respect to content, is Danesi's (1994) work, outlining his conceptualization of teenagerhood and coolness as essential to the motivation of transescent youngsters. These sources have enabled us to see why many of the trees grow as they do. Five interrelated themes have emerged:

1. There is a clear need for the use of innovative and appropriate research methods to integrate research and practice in education, particularly with respect to ecologically complex issues such as teenagerhood, coolness, and risky behaviour. Concerning the relationship between research methods and content in academic research, the suggestion from Mauch and Birch (1998) is salient regarding the need to define method from consideration of the problem stated. In the real world of education, there is a cyclical logic underlying the relationship between practice and research. Evaluation which results in dissatisfaction with practice suggests needs for research, and research, in turn, should result in implications for revisions to practice. Yet Brendtro et al. (1998) identify a dilemma existing in reality, in the shape of a huge gap between the work of researchers and practitioners.

An initial survey of the culture of teenagerhood and coolness, and the proposal that knowledge of this culture comprises a viable approach for practitioners in the education field, is an extremely complex endeavour. Kraizer's (1990) notion that a problem of ecological dimensions requires a systemic method is relevant, as is her accompanying use of metaphor to bring clarity to meaning. This study, by adopting a relatively new methodological stance, has attempted to follow Kraizer's lead.

The research review approach, as outlined and proposed by Cooper (1982, 1985, 1998) and Eisenhart (1998), appears to be an appropriate, legitimate, and viable method for research, not only because it comprises the mortar with which the results from discrete studies may be synthesized into coherent patterns which are relevant in the complex real world, but also because it involves a process of healthy and positive disruption to conventional thinking, resulting in the potential to achieve new and productive approaches to our world's problems. Moreover, there is a certain admirable integrity in a method which honestly admits that the real world about which we claim to do our research exists only as perceptions that we develop through the lenses of our own interpretations. The interpretive review certainly is appropriate to the field of education. To reiterate Schwandt's (1998) words, "Education is interpretation, it involves self-understanding, and its purpose is to make us more human" (p. 411).

This study does not suggest that its use of method, the research review, is the only viable approach to addressing the myriad issues of teenagerhood and educational practice. Eisenhart's (1998) appeal for "groundswell" approaches, however, begs for innovative spirit among researchers. Ultimately, we need to know more about the unique attributes and needs of our transescent population. In light of the ideas proposed by Lesko (1996), Brendtro et al. (1998), Arthur (1998) and Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (1997), we should look to research methods, such as case-study, or ethnography, for example, which respectfully recognize teenagerhood as a legitimate culture, and therefore study it on its own terms and within its own contextual parameters.

The complex issues involved in how our youngsters are motivated to make choices, pursuant to their perceived demands of teenagerhood, begs our best methodological teamwork. Clearly, many youngsters need to be cool. Given our limited success in meeting the challenge of understanding what motivates teens, we must look, as researchers and practitioners, to a combined methodological approach which fosters collaboration between these two stances. We must look to methods which not only comprise sound scholarship, but also disrupt conventional thinking in order to suggest new approaches. Let us not become mired in the "battle" (Oberle, 1991) or the "turmoil" (Kilbourn, 1999) among researchers propounding the preeminence of their paradigms. The integrative-interpretive review appears to be a viable starting point in that it summarizes and brings together a wide variety of previous contributions, and thus encourages future diversity in approaches.

2. The problem of youth at risk is both real and serious. Before we rush off in search of solutions, it behooves us to ensure a problem really exists. The emphasis in this study on Danesi's ideas about coolness and teenagerhood would be gratuitous if the literature did not indicate a significant problem. Is this the case? Clearly, the answer is a resounding "yes". Our concern about the potential dangers resulting from choices made by our adolescent youngsters is gravely legitimate, and our practices with respect to reducing those risks have not always been effective. School dropout, substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, gang membership and violence, suicide--the list is ominous.

While it is important to pay close attention to the data provided by studies such as McCreary (1999), there is also a need for an interpretive approach overlying the statistical data. To offer an example, it is of scarce comfort to read that McCreary reports a low rate of steroid use among British Columbian teens, if our own children are among the minority of those whose steroid use has adversely, and permanently, affected their health.

In some cases, as Kazdin (1993) and Goleman (1995) have pointed out, programs specifically designed to reduce problem behaviours among teens have backfired and actually have increased the target behaviours. Scarce wonder, perhaps, if in focusing too narrowly on the problem behaviour, we have failed to reckon with motivational imperatives (Kraizer, 1990), Several researchers, including McWhirter et al. (1993) and McCreary (1999), reinforce Danesi's (1994) claims about the untoward consequences resulting from teens making harmful decisions in response to motivation resulting from perceptions of coolness.

Hamburg (1993) reminds us of the importance of a preventive stance through bringing this knowledge to bear in dealing with youngsters at the transescent stage; clearly, once youngsters reach adolescence, potentially negative behaviour patterns have already been set. Hand in hand with the notion that teenagerhood is a discrete and legitimate culture must go the idea that transescence is a discrete and legitimate developmental stage. Our best hope for addressing the problems of our youngsters' risky behaviours lies in the need to proceed from these two notions, beginning with learning more about each.

3. Many young adolescents need to be cool, and adults working with young adolescents need to understand, respect, and work with that knowledge. Danesi's (1994) theories on the culture of teenagerhood and the imperative of coolness comprise a viable, and potentially valuable, conceptual framework on which to design strategies for understanding and supporting young adolescents. Danesi's views, supported by researchers cited herein, are innovative yet plausible. As such, they fit our need for alternative approaches to research and practice. Further supporting Danesi's ideas is a growing list of literature, comprising both

popular and academic work, that uses the language of teenagerhood. *Cool* and *nerd*, for example, are terms found in academic literature (Natale, 1995; Merten, 1996; Kinney, 1993; and Bucholtz, 1997).

Inherent in Danesi's (1994) work is the notion that, whether or not we agree with our adolescents' viewpoints, we can respect their need to conceptualize the world in their own way, and make their own decisions accordingly. Lesko (1996) and Brendtro et al. (1998) point clearly to the need for us to afford our youngsters a sense of dignity and respect, reminding us that they are human beings in their own right, and that we, as adults, are not justified in exploiting them, or defining their needs in terms of our own. This stance comprises a powerful argument in favour of Danesi's ideas. As parents, or as professional educators, we cannot absolve ourselves of the responsibility to encourage our children to make safe and healthy choices. But we can, through sensitivity and understanding, be more effective through adopting a stance from which we work with the agenda of teenagerhood and coolness, and not by disregarding or denigrating it. Danesi's work provides us with a conceptual framework on which to develop that stance.

Because the attitudes and behaviours which comprise coolness are neither finite nor limited, varying from time to time, place to place, and group to group, their motivational effects are contextually variable. Practitioners who would strive to use coolness in their preventive or interventive toolbox truly must become students of teenagerhood. First, the symbolic responses viewed by one clique as desirable may be eschewed by another. Knowledge of the cultural identities and symbolic values of each clique is crucial for the practitioner who would understand the behavioural choices of an individual in that clique .

Second, the processes through which coolness motivates youngsters vary widely. Where some teens choose risky behaviours proactively because they are seen as cool and attractive attributes for membership in particular cliques, others may choose risky behaviours reactively--perhaps out of desperation--consequent to being rejected by a cool clique. And as much as these two motivational stances appear to be opposite, and exclusive, they are equally inherent in the context of teenagerhood. Again, the informed practitioner must be aware of the nuances of that context.

Third, overlying the widely variable mutiplicity of teen cliques, their attitudes and behaviours, is a strong sense of peer identity, loyalty, and support among their members. Where this can be seen as an insurmountable obstacle to effective intervention, it can also represent a powerfully effective tool to the practitioner who would work with this knowledge, rather than against it. This kind of knowledge, ultimately, is the enormous challenge and the awesome potential inherent in Danesi's (1994) ideas.

Utopias are not attainable in an ecosystem, and, in any event, it is doubtful that Danesi (1994) would presume to suggest that the acceptance of his ideas represented to any degree a panacea in terms of understanding all behaviours of all teens. But, as noted earlier, if Danesi's ideas provide a potential avenue of support for our youngsters, we cannot afford to ignore that possibility.

4. The function and structure of our schools must accommodate youngsters' real characteristics, needs, and the contextual imperatives of teenagerhood and coolness. Some researchers, including Thornburg (1986), and McEwin and Thomasin (1989), assert that we need to view transescence--that phase of life between childhood and adolescence, and hallmarked by the onset of puberty--as a discrete developmental stage in its own right. Danesi (1994) adds that it is during this stage that perceptions of coolness begin to emerge.

The implementation of middle schools, ostensibly based on the notion that the structure of schools should relate to the characteristics of the students they serve, is far from widespread. Moreover, existing middle schools , in reality, often model their operations on more traditional secondary models, ignoring what the research has told us about middle-level youngsters' attributes and needs--the need to feel known and cared about as an individual, and the need to be be cool among one's peers. We need to ensure the operation and structure of our middle schools and their programs are consistent with what research has told us about the youngsters they purport to serve.

Goleman (1995) points to research which shows that the traditional focus on academic programs, such as encompassed by most school curricula, is not a valid predictor of personal success in life. Yet attention to emotional intelligence and "people skills" lags far behind traditional academic foci in our current curricula. But it is within the broad realm of emotional intelligence and people skills that transescent youngsters initially perceive their attractiveness and effectiveness vis-à-vis the cool peer groups and cliques which comprise their social contexts.

If we can attain a more balanced focus in our middle-level schools, through supplementing existing academic programs with social and emotional skill development, and through involving our youngsters in determining the nature and content of the programs and activities (Sylvester et al., 1999), our students will be encouraged to realize they can be successful in the eyes of the school, and cool in the eyes of their peers, at the same time. Advisory programs (Spencer, 1990; Mac Iver, 1990) and peer-helper programs (Henriksen, 1991; Foster-Harrison, 1995) are but two examples of initiatives which address these issues. For transescent youngsters, being active partners, rather than passive participants, in the processes of schooling, far more closely aligns with the functioning of peer cliques--it is a cooler relationship. We can ensure that our curricula comprise such initiatives, and further, we can strive to develop new inititatives based on this principle.

Brendtro et al. (1998) posit that rebelliousness, bred from boredom, often results when school programs ignore youngsters' innate needs for activity and adventure. It is through the energies of mutual rebelliousness that cool cliques tend to develop. Currently, there is little emphasis on the outdoors and on adventure programs in our current school practice. Much of cool clique behaviour, such as smoking, substance use, sexual activity, and even violence, comprises risk-taking in order to fulfil youngsters' needs for activity, aggressiveness, posturing, and adventure. Our schools, therefore, would do well to find safer ways for youngsters to meet those needs, through incorporation of adventure-based programs which take youngsters out of the classroom and into a cooler environment where adrenaline-based behaviour is acceptable, yet where risks can be calculated and, through adequate supervision, minimized.

Many authors, including Danesi (1994), Doherty (1988), and Strasburger (1995) describe how our youngsters' social and cultural contexts have changed enormously in recent years, including a strong emerging influence by the media. Further, these contexts impose powerful influences on youngsters who are developmentally predisposed to changes in personal attachments. Schools, say

Brendtro et al. (1998), are breeding grounds for alienation, during a stage when, according to Mac Iver (1990) and Spencer (1990), youngsters are most in need of sensing that an adult knows them and cares about them as whole children, and not just as grades in a mark-book. Being accepted, and being cared about, are important components of transescent attachment, and when adults in school are not cool enough to provide these components, youngsters will reject the school environment and will turn alternatively to cool peer cliques. School professionals, therefore, must care, and must be seen to care.

We need the determination, therefore, to design our school structure and programs in alignment with what we know about the nature and characteristics of the youngsters they purport to serve.

5. The roles and practices of professionals in our school system must fit youngsters' real characteristics, needs, and the contextual imperatives of teenagerhood and coolness. Tillotson (1993), Hamburg (1993), Goleman (1995), Danesi (1994), and Brendtro et al. (1998) concur with the notion that, with respect to addressing adolescent issues other than academic performance, it is indeed appropriate for schools to play a leading role. To the extent that school programs emphasize practice, rather than research, Jones (1990) further supports the point made above, that we must strive to close the gap between practice and research. But rarely, it seems, do practitioners mingle with

researchers, much less walk in each other's moccasins, to share what they know about youngsters, their attributes and needs. We need more often to meet, to communicate, to articulate, to consult, to work together, to job-share, and to co-ordinate our efforts.

As for professional school personnel, they must portray a variety of characteristics other than the ability to provide competent academic instruction. To summarize, they must have a knowledge of developmental attributes, they must show the ability to provide a nurturing and caring environment (McEwin & Thomasin, 1989; and Fitzsimmons, 1998). And they must be able to function as members of a strong and cooperative team of professionals (Tillotson, 1993; and McGee & Fauble-Erickson, 1995). While the importance of such attributes seems axiomatic, they demand continuous reaffirmation with respect to the demands of transescent culture. McEwin and Thomasin's (1989) list is worth revisiting: ". . . willing to take risks, . . . receptive to new ideas, . . . sensitive and flexible, . . . not overtly controlling or rigid, . . . respected without being feared, . . . healthy sense of humour." It is not enough that school personnel embody these attributes, they must also be seen to embody them. And youngsters' eyes see through the pervasive lenses of coolness.

The role of the educational counsellor is crucial. In the complex milieu which is representative of today's schools, counsellors' tasks are myriad, as are the skills and knowledge required to perform them. Among the list of attributes emerging as important in supporting at-risk teens is the need to movitate clients who, in keeping with the need to be cool, are uncomfortable, resistant, rebellious, or anti-establishment in attitude (Ritchie, 1994; Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 1997). Another is the need for a systemic approach (Hackney & Cormier, 1996; Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan).

Concerning the role of the counsellor, it is worth reiterating that the progression from motivation to risky behaviour is neither simple nor singular. In some cases youngsters may choose a particular behaviour because it is the norm for a particular clique, and because membership in that clique is viewed as positive and desirable. In other cases, youngsters may choose a particular behaviour out of reaction to being rejected by a particular clique, or, in the case of Danesi's (1994) losers, by all cliques. Regardless, the counsellor aware of the imperatives of coolness will certainly be able to intervene with respect and sensitivity to the motivational factors in effect.

Respect and sensitivity relate to counsellors' acceptance of teenagerhood as a unique and discrete culture. The ability to maintain a multi-cultural stance is essential, when dealing with youngsters whose predominant cultural background, as Danesi (1994) would suggest, is cool teenagerhood (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 1997; Das, 1995; Merali, 1999; Arthur, 1998;

Patterson, 1996). Conyne (1997) outlines the skills needed to adopt a successful preventive stance. This is particularly important for transescents since it is during that stage that visions of coolness, and accompanying risky behaviours, begin to emerge. Inherent in Conyne's work are some themes which relate directly to the focus of this study. In advocating for a preventive approach, he reminds us for the need for a systemic, ecological, multi-cultural stance, focusing on groups rather than individuals. He recommends collaboration and teamwork, emphasizing the need to synthesize the efforts of a widely disparate group of practitioners, including those in communication technology and the media. These themes align with many of the positions which have emerged throughout this study.

Several authors propound the need for counsellors to maximize their time and energies through the training, coordination and use of peer helpers or lay personnel (Steele, 1985; Dorsch, 1995; Foster-Harrison, 1995). Further, since it is characteristic of cool transescent youngsters to spend increasing amounts of their time in the company of clique-mates, it certainly makes sense to encourage the development of helping skills among their peers. The relevance and importance of peer helping programs with respect to the tendency of teens to participate in cliques were identified earlier in this study. It is worth reiterating that counsellors, by virtue of their training and (hopefully) their attributes as professional helpers, should be the most appropriate people to spearhead such programs.

There is a clear need for counsellors to evaluate, and perhaps revise, their practice vis-à-vis their mandate as determined by the Ministry of Education. And always, there is a need for counsellors to be aware that the foundation of their profession is the ability to be warm, genuine, empathic, respectful, and congruent in fostering an effective relationship between themselves and their clients (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 1997; Conyne, 1997; Patterson, 1996). Indeed, these are the attributes that young adolescents perceive as cool among the adults in their lives, and if we wish our youngsters to retain a sense of attachment to school, the practitioners therein must be seen as embodying these attributes.

In summary, the imperatives of coolness influence the behaviour of many transescent youngsters. To the extent that resultant behaviours are risky, adults may tend to view the pursuit of coolness as negative--a problem to be solved. But at the same time, acknowledging the culture of teenagerhood may be viewed as a potentially valuable opportunity for caring practitioners to respond to the needs of youngsters in an understanding and respectful way. In this sense, appreciating the demands of coolness may more appropriately be regarded as a resource with which sensitive and respectful practitioners may provide support to youngsters in a unique and fascinating stage of development. Coolness is important to our children. It should be equally important to those of us professionally entrusted with their care.

Suggesting Some Implications for Further Study

Traditional thesis design calls for suggestions at this point as to topics or areas for future research. However the nature of an integrative-interpretive review, such as this study hopes to comprise, renders this task difficult. Clearly, any of the dozens of works cited, or ideas considered, could lead to areas of legitimate concern with respect to future research. Each twig among our foliage ends in a bud which has the potential eventually to branch out in many directions.

The interpretive aspect of this method is salient. Each reader of this paper will be left with questions or concerns which will emerge inevitably from the perceptions inherent in the lenses of his or her interpretation. This researcher will not be presumptuous enough to attempt to anticipate the readers' interests or perceptions. But inasmuch as the researcher's perceptions are integral to the interpretive process, I will suggest some directions for further study which are relevant to my own biases, and in particular, to those which relate to my position as an elementary school counsellor. They are simply posed as questions, and are listed in no particular order.

1. What would be the result if another researcher attempted to replicate this study using the same methodological approach?

2. How effective are integrative-interpretive reviews with respect to research topics, other than this one, in education? What are the current perceptions as to the acceptability of reviews in academic research since the emergence of Cooper's (1982, 1985, 1998) works, or Eisenhart's (1998) article?

3. Within the perceptions of young adolescents, to what extent is it possible for an adult, such as a teacher or a counsellor, to be characterized as cool, and if so, what qualities comprise that characteristic? Will that perception have any effect on the extent to which the adult will be able to influence the young adolescents' behavioural choices?

4. How do an individual's perceptions of his or her own coolness relate to the perceptions of his or her peers concerning the individual's coolness? How do these perceptions affect behavioural choices?

5. In light of the pervasive effect of the media on youngsters' perceptions of coolness, how effective are media-appreciation programs with respect to personal decision-making?

6. Although Danesi (1994) identifies the tendency for adolescents to form cliques as essential to teenagerhood, he suggests that specific cliques are ephemeral, and dependent on time and place. Notwithstanding, this researcher

has observed a strong similarity between the cliques Danesi identified during the late 1980s in Toronto, and those found in Williams Lake, B. C., in the late 1990s. (For example, Danesi's "Bat Cavers" are closely analogous to "Goths" as identified informally by Williams Lake teens. Danesi's "B-Boys" are similar to Williams Lake's "Homies". His "Norms" are analogous to Williams Lake's "Preppies", and so on.

Even though the names may change, are the identities inherent in various cliques more standardized and enduring than Danesi suggests? Within the perceptions of young adolescents, is there a hierarchy of desirability concerning membership in the various cliques? Is membership in some cliques predictably a matter of reactive strategy, rather than desirability (in the sense of "I'm not cool enough to join that other group, so I guess I'll have to join this one.")? Would an ethnographic approach be efficacious in drawing together the relationships among cliques from time to time and from place to place?

7. How has the widespread acceptance of computer technology affected the hierarchies of cliques? Have there emerged cliques whose characteristic coolness focuses on competence in the use and application of computer technology?

8. To what extent are counsellors aware of cliques in their schools and among their clientele, and to what extent do counsellors, in practice, address

clique-specific issues? How do youngsters view these initiatives in terms of coolness?

9. What programs currently in use in our schools, if any, succeed in the development of "emotional intelligence" as defined by Goleman (1995)? How effective are they? How do youngsters view these programs in terms of coolness?

10. What adventure-based programs are currently in use in our schools? To what extend do these programs utilize alternative environments such as the outdoors? How effective are they, particularly with respect to at-risk students? How do youngsters view these programs in terms of coolness?

11. How do teen cliques relate to social or cultural issues such as ethnic background, socio-economic status, rural or urban context, or geographical location?

These are questions which might imply directions for future research in the broad area of the culture of teenagerhood, as defined by Danesi (1994), and our responses, as practitioners, to the attributes and needs of that culture. They also are questions of interest to this researcher, with respect to transescent coolness, at this time. Beyond the dimension of content inherent in each, of equal interest would be the choice and development of a method appropriate to each. Both dimensions are necessarily interrelated, as the chosen method of this study was to its focus and goals.

Addressing the Significance of this Study

As our tour of the forest nears completion, this tour guide hopes that the experience has been interesting and productive for all participants. We have seen a great deal. Much of the forest environment comprises strong, healthy organisms, living in dynamic balance with the rest of the ecosystem's inhabitants. The extent to which blight affects the trees is perhaps normal, but of concern notwithstanding. If we are moved to act on what we've seen, let us not lose sight of the many strong and healthy processes existing there. But where we find disease or weakness, let us work to eradicate or strengthen. Let us hope that in the footprints we leave behind, new and healthy growth will emerge.

St. Pierre's (1966) Smith, in this chaper's second epigraph, could well be describing our education system when he says, "I'm not running this place half as good as I know how to already" (p. 70). This study has cited sources which point to the fact that our professional practice sometimes ignores what we know about youngsters, their characteristics, and their needs. It is doubtful that Danesi's (1994) notions about coolness and teenagerhood comprise new knowledge about teen culture. But, through tweaking our perceptions about how our transescent youngsters view their world, he provides a new focal point from which we may address more effectively the issues of teen risky behaviours.

I believe this study has presented sufficient evidence that Danesi's ideas represent a viable foundation on which to develop positive strategies with which practitioners can guide and counsel our transescent youngsters to make safe and wise choices. For those whose interpretive vision does not completely align with Danesi's views, perhaps this study has, at least, inspired the need for us to renew our efforts with respect to synchronizing our practices with the results of research. Clearly, the happiness, health, and safety of the children in our care is of major concern to us all. Inasmuch as this concern comprises the content of this study, its significance, hopefully, may be regarded as axiomatic.

Brendtro et al. (1998) quote Key (1909): "Absolutely new truths are very rare. Truths which were once new must be constantly renewed by being pronounced again from the depths of the ardent personal convictions of a new human being" (p. 1). Key's words appear prescient with respect to the outcomes of this study. If, throughout this paper, some renewal of truths have been seen to emerge, however briefly, then hopefully this work will have been significant--and, for the sake of our youngsters, worthwhile.

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APPENDIX A

**Search Matrix of *ERIC* Expert Keywords, and Resultant Hits, Pertaining to Teenagerhood and Coolness**

| "(Expert Keyword)" and... | Number of Hits: "Early Adolescents" | Number of Hits: "Pre-adolescents" |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Innate and Developmental Attributes | | |
| Identity | 76 | 28 |
| Self-concept | 161 | 101 |
| Self-esteem | 176 | 105 |
| Self-management | 38 | 18 |
| Self-actualization | 11 | 6 |
| Self-empowerment | 5 | 4 |
| Psychological Needs | 63 | 16 |
| Spirituality | 1 | 0 |
| Body Image | 24 | 11 |
| 2. External Influences | | |
| Parent Influence | 118 | 68 |
| Sibling Influence | 1 | 2 |
| Family Influence | 144 | 66 |
| Intervention | 324 | 74 |
| Counselor Role | 23 | 11 |
| School Counselors | 66 | 20 |
| School Counseling | 214 | 91 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Counselor Influence | 2 | 0 |
| Cliques | 3 | 0 |
| Peer Groups | 62 | 37 |
| Peer Influence | 78 | 72 |
| Peer Relationships | 42 | 27 |
| Peer Pressure | 17 | 20 |
| Peer Acceptance | 30 | 23 |
| Peer Culture | 9 | 4 |
| School Transitions | 28 | 11 |
| Mass Media | 36 | 23 |
| Music | 19 | 18 |
| Rock Music | 2 | 0 |
| Style | 51 | 0 |
| Fashion | 4 | 0 |
| Clothing | 4 | 0 |
| Dress | 0 | 2 |

3. Behaviours

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Risk Taking | 22 | 4 |
| Substance Use | 64 | 31 |
| Smoking | 37 | 47 |
| Substance Abuse | 106 | 31 |
| Sexuality | 193 | 35 |
| Language | 102 | 94 |
| Appearance | 12 | 6 |
| Eating Disorders | 16 | 2 |
| Rituals | 1 | 2 |
| Gangs | 10 | 3 |
| Violence | 70 | 0 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Suicide | 58 | 18 |
| Dropout | 102 | 3 |
| School Dropout | 89 | 11 |
| Academic Success | 24 | 11 |
| School Success | 67 | 32 |

The text of this study includes extensive use of the term "transescents" in reference to young adolescents. The *ERIC* database does not make wide use of this term as a descriptor, however, and for this reason, this study has utilized the terms "early adolescent" and "pre-adolescent" as synonymous Expert Keywords in the search process.

Indeed, in many cases, *ERIC* recognizes a wide variety of virtually synonymous terms as Expert Keywords. The interpretive process inherent in this study has dictated that, where there is a strong overlap of citations resulting from similar Expert Keywords, some will not be included. For example, for "smoking", I have chosen not to include "tobacco" or "tobacco use"; similarly, for "substance abuse," I have chosen not to include "alcohol," "alcohol use," "alcohol abuse," "drugs," "drug use," "drug abuse," and so on.

# APPENDIX B

## Search Matrix of *ERIC* Expert Keywords, and Resultant Hits, Pertaining to Integrative and Interpretive Research Review Methodology

| Expert Keywords | Number of Hits |
|---|---|
| Integrative Reviews | 153 |
| Interpretive Reviews | 166 |
| Research Synthesis | 2451 |
| Integrative Reviews and Research Synthesis | 3 |
| Interpretive Reviews and Research Synthesis | 4 |
| Methodology and Integrative Reviews | 20 |
| Methodology and Interpretive Reviews | 39 |
| Methodology and Research Synthesis | 343 |

Many of the hits comprised articles which proved to be examples of the methods listed, rather than explications or discussions of the specific methodology.